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**THE SOURCES OF PROTRACTED CONFLICT IN THE
WESTERN SAHARA**

by

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March 2016

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THE SOURCES OF PROTRACTED CONFLICT IN THE WESTERN SAHARA

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Captain, United States Army
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ABSTRACT

Since the ceasefire of 1991, Morocco and the POLISARIO Front have maintained a stalemate in the Western Sahara conflict. This obscure war, which recently surpassed forty years of hostilities, is at the center of a complex set of regional and foreign interests that encourage its prolongation. New threats in the Sahel, a region riddled with international crime, have brought the contest into focus as gravely important to world order. The UN and international community recognize the potential of this conflict to destabilize North Africa and southern Europe and seek ways forward. While the conflict has roots in superpower rivalry and Algerian–Moroccan competition for regional hegemony, other forces have contributed to its persistence. This study examines potential explanations for the persistence of the conflict, especially inadequate UN organizational structures, Moroccan nationalism, and Algerian domestic politics. Other factors that have received too little attention include competition for national resources, international geopolitics, the weakness of neighboring states, and lobbying by special-interest NGOs. Critical issues and potential areas of reform are identified and recommendations made to assist policymakers and strategists in reaching conflict resolution.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
FLU	Front de Libération et de l'Unité
GSPC	The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
ICJ	International Court of Justice
MINURSO	Misión de las Naciones Unidas para la Organización del Referéndum en el Sáhara Occidental (UN Misión for the Referendum in Western Sahara)
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
POLISARIO	Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y Río de Oro
PUNS	Partido de la Unión Nacional Saharaui
SADR	Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

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My parents:
You have empowered me to conquer the world.

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Les batailles de la vie ne sont pas gagnées par les plus forts ni par les plus rapides mais
par ceux qui n'abandonnent jamais.

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I. THE WESTERN SAHARA CONFLICT: OVERVIEW

The Western Sahara conflict is one of the least known and the most under-covered conflicts in the world, approaching its fortieth anniversary with no hope of resolution. The United Nations (UN) recognizes the Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro (POLISARIO Front) as the governing body over the region, which it recognizes as the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), a government currently operating in exile in the Tindouf region of Algeria. The POLISARIO Front objective is to obtain independence from Morocco and establish an internationally recognized sovereign state. Morocco's government considers Western Sahara a territory and the POLISARIO Front a dangerous separatist group that threatens the unity of the kingdom.

Since 1981, when the UN negotiated a truce to armed conflict between Morocco and the POLISARIO Front, affairs between Morocco and the POLISARIO Front have remained at a stalemate. A web of international interests have fueled the persistence of the status quo and created a humanitarian crisis largely hidden from public scrutiny. This hostile impasse has weathered major geopolitical storms that have changed the political landscape of the world; it has outlasted the Cold War and survived the turbulence of the Arab spring (in this time, it has grown as a security and economic threat to North Africa and southern Europe—one that could potentially derail U.S. stability efforts in the region).

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

The research asks, what are the factors or dynamics that have stalled the resolution of the Western Sahara conflict? To answer this question, the evolution of the conflict, the historical and political perspectives of the major antagonists, and the military and diplomatic maneuvers of the Moroccan, Algerian, and self-proclaimed Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic governments are presented, with a detailed discussion of the Algerian government's support and lobbying for Western Sahara

separatism. The levels of interest and political will of the United States, the European Union, and the African Union are also evaluated.

B. SIGNIFICANCE

The Western Sahara conflict has rarely surfaced as a top issue for the United Nations, world governments, and the media. But with the emergence of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Arab Spring, and now the Islamic State (ISIS), the UN and major powers have recognized that continuing unrest in this region could destabilize North Africa and southern Europe. The most pressing reasons to resolve the conflict are an escalating humanitarian crisis, security concerns, the empowerment of international crime, and Islamist threats.

1. Escalating Humanitarian Crisis

The Saharawi people of Western Sahara lack self-determination and independence, denied due to the occupation of their traditional lands by the Moroccan government, despite an International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion in favor of Saharawi self-determination. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that over 50,000 Sahrawi fled the violence caused by Morocco's annexation of Western Sahara, settling in refugee camps in the Tindouf region of southern Algeria.¹ In the years from 1976 to the Arab Spring in 2011, Morocco was accused of severe oppression and mistreatment of the Sahrawi residing in Western Sahara, and a condemnation for human-rights violations was issued by the UN Security Council.² As late as 2010, the Voice of America reported "that the council expressed its condemnation of the recent deaths and injuries during a raid on a protest camp city outside the Western Saharan city of Laayoune."³ Neither the raids nor the violence

¹ "Western Sahara Territory," UNHCR News, accessed September 2, 2015., <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e4861f6.html>.

² "Political Ambiguity over Western Sahara, Polarizing Ideologies, Plight of Refugees Central to Fourth Committee Debate as Petitioners Appeal for End to Conflict," UN News Center, February 4, 2008, accessed September 2, 2015. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2012/gaspd506.doc.htm>.

³ Ibid.

gained the attention of the international community, however, and media coverage was minimal.

Sahrawi living in Algerian refugee camps are also alleged to have suffered extreme repression, and even torture; the governments of Algeria and the UN-recognized POLISARIO Front (PF) have been accused of human-rights violation. In 2015, the EU corruption watchdog OLAF released a scathing report exposing POLISARIO collusion with the Algerian government in an elaborate scheme to swindle funds from the EU for over a decade.⁴ The OLAF investigation also exposed the defalcation of millions of dollars' worth of commodities from Canada and the United States that had been designated to help the Saharawi people in Tindouf. The whole sordid affair is an example of how a sticky conflict, allowed to fester, has invited crime and corruption, making life ever more unbearable for the refugees in Tindouf.

2. Security Concerns

The 2003 kidnapping of some thirty tourists in the Algerian desert by Salafists for the purpose of preaching and combat first highlighted the instability in the Sahara-Sahelian region of western Africa. This has reached a critical state with the recent unrest in Mali, which required international military intervention.

Between 1974 and 2013, at least 31 non-state groups entered into conflicts with Sahara-Saharan states at one time or another. Eighteen coups d'état were successful in overthrowing governments in the region, notably in Mauritania (1978, 1984, 2005 and 2008), Niger (1974, 1996, 1999 and 2010), Chad (1975, 1980, 1982 and 1990) and Mali (1968, 1991 and 2012). The violence was especially long-lasting in Algeria (from 1991 to 2002 and then more intermittently) and in Chad (1973–1994, 1997–2002 and 2005–09).⁵

The contribution of the Arab Spring has been a rise in religious radicalism and political turmoil in Tunisia; in Libya, it has created a catastrophe. Moammar Gadhafi

⁴ Magnus Norell, "Embezzlement in Sahara," *Huffington Post*, February 23, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/magnus-norell/embezzlement-in-sahara_b_6639248.html.

⁵ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Security Issues, Movement and Networks in the Sahara-Sahel," in *An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel Geography, Economics and Security* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2014), 174–176.

spent billions of petro dollars to extend his influence in Africa, creating the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) in 1998 and covering 80 percent of its budget.⁶ Gaddafi integrated 28 African countries within the CEN-SAD and forged ties with many rebel groups of the Sahel, from which he recruited 6,000 to 8,000 men to join his brutal security force. When Gadhafi's regime collapsed, the non-Libyan members of the force fled with a great number of weapons.⁷ Stockpiles found their way to separatist and terrorist groups in the Sahara, including the POLISARIO Front and AQIM.

3. Criminal Activities

The fallout from the degradation of the political establishment on both ends of the Sahel cannot be underestimated. Major trafficking operations supply terrorist activities and connect them to the world economy. Local Saharan criminal activities and international criminal organizations have capitalized on the security vacuum and increased their activity.

4. South American Cocaine Trafficking

Western Africa has become the most desirable route for South American drug cartels to reach the European cocaine market. The overhead costs are higher, and so is delivery time; but the rate of loss due to seizure is significantly lower. Narcotics-laden vessels anchor in the ports of Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Ghana, Mauritania and Senegal, and their cargo makes its way into Europe through via two established routes. The eastern route runs through Niger, Chad, and Libya to the port of Benghazi. Smugglers taking the western route stage in Mali and traverse the semi-governed areas in the southeast of Algeria, through the POLISARIO Front camps in Tindouf.⁸

⁶ Ibid., 197.

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Security Issues, Movements and Networks, 197.

⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Global Security Risks and West Africa Development Challenges* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2012), 44–45.

5. Other Criminal Activity

Besides narcotics, these smuggling routes are used for a variety of commodities and contraband, such as weapons, ivory, rhinoceros horn, cigarettes, counterfeit medical drugs, precious stones, wood, oil, toxic waste, alcohol, stolen 4x4s and luxury vehicles.

The POLISARIO Front is the main purveyor of light weapons to and from Mauritania. The traffic takes place throughout the Western Sahara in Mali and in Algeria. The city of Zouerate in Mauritania is a market well known throughout the region for its caches and stocks of arms.⁹

Human smuggling and kidnapping have flourished amid western- and North African unrest. In the last decade, 85 Westerners and seven Algerian diplomats were kidnapped from the Sahara-Sahel and held hostage, some of them perishing in captivity.¹⁰ Westerners are prized targets.

6. Islamist Radicalism Threat

The emergence of Al Qaeda in West Africa occurred in Algeria. The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) surfaced in 1996 and later became the Al Qaeda franchise AQIM.¹¹ Within a brief period of operations, mainly targeting Algerian security forces, AQIM increased in power and popularity, eventually expanding its network into Europe and targeting civilians. AQIM has been responsible for several high profile terrorist and kidnapping cases, such as the 2003 abduction of 32 European tourists in Algeria, which yielded a ransom of EUR 5 million,¹² and the 2007 bombing of a UN building in Algeria, killing 26 civilians and injuring 177.¹³

⁹ OECD, *Global Security Risks*, 48.

¹⁰ OECD, "Security Issues, Movements and Networks," 192.

¹¹ OECD, *Global Security Risks*, 14.

¹² Salima Mellah and Jean Baptiste, "El Para, the Maghreb's Bin Laden," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 1, 2005, accessed September 5, 2015, <https://mondediplo.com/2005/02/04algeria>.

¹³ Katrin Bennhold, and Craig Smith, "Twin Bombs Kill Dozens in Algiers," *New York Times*, December 11, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/>.

Since 2007, AQIM, which declared its support for ISIS in 2014,¹⁴ has attempted to “unite the Salafi jihadi movement beyond Algeria in Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, with the ultimate goal of over-throwing the incumbent regimes and establishing an Islamic Caliphate in the Maghreb.”¹⁵ Islamist terrorists have forged transnational alliances in North Africa, Sahel and West Africa,¹⁶ exacerbating the Western Sahara conflict and underscoring the urgency and relevance of the problem.

The Moroccan government and its international partners have had some success in responding to Islamist challenges, but the threat is still growing. New radical groups such as Ansar al-Islam Fissahra al Muslima, Bilad al Mulathamin—which proclaimed its allegiance to al-Qaeda through AQIM—continue to emerge. North African fighters forced out of Iraq and Syria present a danger to the western Mediterranean and Europe. The ideologies of the Salafiya al-Jihadiya and as-Sira al Mustaqim movements have spread, and the activities of al-Qaeda, which capitalizes on the centuries-old smuggling routes of the Sahara-Sahel, have notably increased. Moreover, the geographical proximity of Morocco to Europe and West Africa, where a substantial Moroccan diaspora exists (wielding considerable political, economic, and cultural influence), means that the risk cannot easily be contained. “Morocco's fight against jihadist ideology and violence will likely be a prolonged struggle in which the strategic stakes are increasingly global.”¹⁷

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The factors underlying the failure of the international community to resolve the Western Sahara conflict are many and much discussed. The major points explored in the literature are summarized in the following sections.

¹⁴ Hamid Yess, “Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb Backs ISIS.” *Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East*, July 2, 2014.

¹⁵ OECD, *Global Security Risks*, 15.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ J. Peter Pham, “Islamist Extremism’s Rising Challenge to Morocco.” *World Defense Review*, July 8, 2008.

1. Algerian Hegemony

Algeria has been a staunch rival of Moroccan over regional hegemony since its independence from France. Algeria is extremely leery of Morocco's perceived ambition of expanding its borders into Algerian territory. The Algerian government wants no interference with its ambition to control the Western Sahara and desire to exploit the region's natural resources.

Yahia H. Zoubir, in his article "In Search of Hegemony: The Western Sahara in Algerian–Moroccan Relations," meticulously explains Algeria's regional interests and the reason they clash with Moroccan foreign policy, covering the country's revolutionary history, military capability, and colossal military budget. Analyzing Algeria's rich oil revenues and cash reserves exceeding \$200 billion, the author makes a compelling case for Algeria's hegemonic view of the region, based on its large resource endowment.¹⁸

In *The Middle East Journal* article, "The Western Sahara Conflict: Myths and Realities," John Damis argues that the Western Sahara conflict is regional and stems from the rivalry between two competitive regimes: a constitutional monarchy with a liberal outlook towards the West in Morocco and a repressive military regime in Algeria. The conflict over the Western Sahara is a simply a struggle between two ideologies competing for influence in North Africa.¹⁹ The author demonstrates that the critical decisions that led to and maintains the conflict were not made in Paris or Washington, but in Rabat, Algeria, and Nouakchott.²⁰ Further, Damis writes that while Algeria does not officially claim the territory of the Western Sahara, it is waging a proxy war against Morocco by supporting the POLISARIO Front.²¹

Barry M. Rubin, in *Conflict and Insurgency in the Contemporary Middle East*, details the distrust Algeria has for the West and its ally Morocco. The author refers to a

¹⁸ Yahia H. Zoubir, "In Search of Hegemony: The Western Sahara in Algerian–Moroccan Relations," *Journal of Algerian Studies* 2 (1997): 43–61.

¹⁹ John Damis, "The Western Sahara Conflict: Myths and Realities," *Middle East Journal* 37, no. 2 (1983): 169–70, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4326560>.

²⁰ Ibid., 171.

²¹ Ibid..

diplomatic cable sent by a former U.S. ambassador to Algeria, Robert Ford, describing Algerian leaders in 2008, as “a prickly, paranoid group to work with.”²² Rubin makes a convincing argument that Algeria keeps the conflict alive to ensure that the Moroccan military and economy remain bogged down and unable to fulfill their ambition of expanding eastward into Algerian territory.

Rubin highlights the economic assets of Western Sahara in terms of natural resources, teeming coastal fisheries, and access to the Atlantic Ocean, adding these economic incentives to the Algerian government’s motivations and role in the persistence of the conflict.

2. Foreign Interests

In *Western Sahara: War Nationalism And Conflict Irresolution*, Stephen Zunes lays out the historical and political context, juxtaposing the ICJ dismissal of Morocco’s claim to Western Sahara with the UN Security Council’s inability to pressure Morocco to withdraw from the occupied territory.²³ Zunes writes,

In word and deed, France and the United States have shared a profound and longstanding desire to protect, help, and bolster the Moroccan regime. Holding a key geostrategic point at the mouth of the Mediterranean, the postcolonial Moroccan state has become, by virtue of historical and geographical contingency, pivotal to global stability (i.e., Western hegemony).²⁴

This statement captures the author’s main argument that the West, in particular France and the U.S., has implicitly or explicitly supported Morocco’s annexation of the Western Sahara. The author details U.S. and French direct military support during the war, and their activities in the Security Council during the peace process. He uses the phrase “Franco–American consensus”²⁵ to refer to American and French dedication to

²² Barry M. Rubin, *Conflict and Insurgency in the Contemporary Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2009).

²³ Stephen Zunes, and Jacob Mundy, *Western Sahara : War, Nationalism And Conflict Irresolution* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 5.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

preserving and protecting the monarchy, even at the expense of peace and international law. The author describes the Western Sahara conflict as a threat to the Moroccan monarchy, which the U.S. and France consider a model of modernity and tolerance for other Arab and Muslim countries. From a Western perspective, the author describes the Moroccan monarchy as a “cornerstone of Middle Eastern, African, Mediterranean, and even global stability from the Cold War to the war on terror and [the West] cannot bear the loss of Western Sahara.”²⁶ Zunes identifies Morocco’s ability to market its alleged threats, from socialism to political Islam, to appeal to U.S. and French foreign policy and consolidate support.²⁷

Zune highlights the American tradition of cooperation with Morocco during the Cold War, which provided a space where U.S.–Russian rivalry played out²⁸. He adds that in recent years, the strategic importance of Morocco to U.S. diplomatic efforts in Africa has increased. Morocco’s location, wedged between Europe and vast political unrest in the region, raises its strategic significance even further.

In his book *The Dying Sahara: U.S. Imperialism and Terror in Africa*, Jeremy Keenan asserts that the George W. Bush administration set its sights on controlling African oil after 9/11. He adds that the administration created the United States African Command (AFRICOM) under the veil of the global war on terrorism to ensure control over the flow of hydrocarbons from sub-Saharan Africa.²⁹

Keenan describes the massive military cooperation between the U.S. and Morocco—a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally—and its willingness to participate in a multitude of military campaigns in African and the Middle East. AFRICOM has a substantial footprint in Africa and relies on Morocco’s logistical support and intelligence cooperation. Morocco hosts AFRICOM’s largest annual joint

²⁶ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 56.

²⁷ Ibid., 95.

²⁸ Ibid., 84.

²⁹ Jeremy Keenan, *The Dying Sahara: U.S. Imperialism and Terror in Africa* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2013), 124.

military exercise, African Lion, in which dozens of European and African forces participate.³⁰

3. Economic Interests And Natural Resources

The U.S. finds in Morocco a substantial trading partner and gateway to investments in Africa. Morocco's economic growth has accelerated in recent years in terms of GDP, and U.S. exports to Moroccan markets now exceed one billion dollars annually.³¹ U.S. investments in Morocco have nearly doubled since the enforcement of the U.S.–Moroccan free-trade agreement (the only American free trade agreement in Africa), which provides U.S. investors with unparalleled access to African markets.³² The Western Sahara conflict threatens U.S. economic interests in Africa, particularly its ability to counter Chinese economic expansion in the continent.

In his book *EU Integration with North Africa: Trade Negotiations and Democracy Deficits in Morocco*, Carl Dawson details the political, economic, and strategic importance of Morocco to the EU. He cites its strategic location directly above the sub-Saharan region on the western corner of Africa and the Maghreb and across from Spanish shores, allowing the passage of one the most important gas and oil pipelines feeding Europe.³³

The waters of the Western Sahara are a substantial source of resources vital to the economies of Spain and Portugal. In *The Western Sahara Conflict: The Role of Natural Resources in Decolonization*, Claes Olsson refers to the EU–Moroccan fishing agreement as one of many trade agreements between Europe and the kingdom that undermine the possibility of exerting economic pressure on Rabat. The author details the terms of the

³⁰ “3,000 U.S., Allied Troops Launch Crisis Response Drills in Morocco,” *Air Force Times*, May 19, 2015.

³¹ “Agriculture Boosted Morocco's Economic Growth Rate in 2013: HCP,” *UMCI News*, June 4, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1531794940?accountid=12702>.

³² “Morocco's Emergence as a Gateway to Business in Africa,” Atlantic Council, August 4, 2014, accessed September 11, 2015, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/moroccos-emergence>.

³³ Carl Dawson, *EU Integration with North Africa: Trade Negotiations and Democracy Deficits in Morocco* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 5.

\$185 million deal and asserts its illegality, explaining why critics consider this agreement a “backdoor legitimization of Moroccan rule”³⁴ in the Western Sahara.

European countries continue to be major trading partners with the countries of northern and western Africa, particularly Morocco and Algeria. France is Morocco’s largest trading partner and controls more than 60 percent of its direct foreign investment. Multiple EU countries have relocated their manufacturing platforms to Morocco to benefit from Morocco’s skilled and cheap labor. The success of Renault-Nissan’s flagship plants in Tangier has encouraged other heavyweights of the manufacturing industry, notably FigeacAero, Peugeot-Citroen, Bombardier, and Boeing, to invest in the Sharifian kingdom.³⁵

A significant recent discovery of oil and gas off the Moroccan coast, combined with a wealth of shale deposits and wind and solar energy in Western Sahara, has introduced a new complication in the Western Sahara conflict. In Morocco proper, the oil-shale deposit at Timahdit in the Middle Atlas Mountains contains an estimated 15 billion barrels, while the deposit at Tarfaya contains an estimated 22 billion barrels.³⁶ These reserves are dwarfed by the reserves estimated in Western Sahara. The Tindouf basin, which stretches across central Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania and Western Algeria, contains an estimated 1.5 trillion cubic meters of recoverable shale deposits.³⁷ Reportedly, over 40 companies rushed to acquire licenses to drill in the Western Sahara region; others invested in Western Sahara by constructing the largest wind farms and

³⁴ Claes Olsson, ed., “The Western Sahara Conflict: The Role of Natural Resources in Decolonization,” The Nordic Africa Institute, 2006, <http://www.divaportal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:240540&dswid=2342>.

³⁵ Samir Bennis, “Is Morocco Becoming Africa’s Major Investment Hub?” *Morocco World News*, June 21, 2015, <http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2015/06/161398/is-morocco-becoming-africas-major-investment-hub/>.

³⁶ Harold R. Newman, “The Mineral Industries of Morocco and Western Sahara,” *United States Geological Survey*, February, 2011, <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/2011/myb3-2011-mo-wi.pdf>.

³⁷ Chuck Boyer, “Shale Gas: A Global Resource,” *Oilfield Review* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 2011), https://www.slb.com/~media/Files/resources/oilfield_review/ors11/aut11/03_shale_gas.pdf.

solar plants in Africa.³⁸ This level of investment has the potential to satisfy Morocco's energy needs and allow the export of a substantial amount of hydrocarbon and electricity to southern Europe. Despite Algeria and the POLISARIO Front's unsuccessful attempts to deter potential investors from establishing projects in the territory of Western Sahara,³⁹ American and European investors continue their activities in the Western Sahara, complicating the Morocco-POLISARIO Front stalemate.

4. Failures of the United Nations

In his 2005 book, *The Western Sahara: Anatomy of a Stalemate*, Erik Jensen takes a deep dive into the series of events that led to the conflict in the Western Sahara, laying the blame for failure to achieve resolution at the feet of the United Nations.⁴⁰ He focuses on the relatively recent history of the country, starting with the colonization of Spain in the late 1800s, and explains the king's post-independence strategy of constructing a "Greater Morocco" identity with roots in pre-colonial history. Jensen details the chronology of Moroccan control over the Western Sahara and the creation of the SADR. Identifying the complicity of foreign actors in the conflict, Jensen divides them into Russian and American camps, emphasizing the role of the Cold War in the conflict. The POLISARIO Front, backed by Algeria, Libya and Cuba, sympathized with the Soviet Union; Morocco was a staunch anti-communist supporter of the West.

Jensen examines every stage of UN involvement in POLISARIO–Moroccan negotiations and demonstrates repeated failure. He observes that the Security Council refused to consider sanctions or any form of pressure to bring the two parties to a compromise. He also explains how the ceasefire perpetuated the world's ignorance of the conflict's importance. Anna Theofilopoulou, who covered Western Sahara and the

³⁸ "Morocco Wind Farm, Africa's Biggest, Starts Generating Power," *Alarabiya*, April 25, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/business/2014/04/25/Morocco-win-farm-Africa-s-biggest-starts-generating-power-.html>.

³⁹ Christopher Coates, "Western Sahara Looms Heavy Over Morocco's Energy Aspirations," *Forbes*, January 14, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/christophercoates/2014/01/14/western-sahara-looms-heavy-over-moroccos-energy-aspirations/>.

⁴⁰ Erik Jensen, *Western Sahara: Anatomy of a Stalemate* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).

Maghreb region in the UN's Department of Political Affairs from 1994 to 2004, states in her special report that

the Security Council, while having expressed support for Baker's efforts in its resolutions, proved unwilling to ask the parties to make the difficult decisions required to solve the conflict. When Morocco rejected the peace plan, the Council, despite having unanimously supported it, did nothing.⁴¹

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Four hypotheses are discussed and evaluated in this thesis. The first is that the Western Sahara conflict is a product of Algerian aggression and its suspicion of neighboring Morocco. While Algeria is a relatively new country created by the French, Morocco is an old country ruled by a longstanding dynasty that promotes the great-Morocco narrative. By this hypothesis, Algeria's fear that Morocco aims to expand its territory, and Algeria's own desire to pursue economic interests in Western Sahara, are the reason for the persistence of the conflict.

The second hypothesis examines the role of foreign powers in the conflict. Morocco's alliance with France and the U.S. created a venue for Soviet–American rivalry to play out during the Cold War, after which Morocco became a U.S. ally in the war on terrorism. The POLISARIO Front connection with AQIM puts it on the opposite side of the conflict and fuels continuing hostilities.

The third hypothesis suggests that the Western Sahara conflict endures as a result of the UN's failure to act. Though the IJC found the Moroccan annexation illegal, and the UN has the means necessary to force Morocco to withdraw, the Security Council fails to act, or chooses not to.

The final hypothesis is that the conflict persists because of a combination of factors. It is curious, for example, that very little literature exists on the Moroccan government's contribution to the continuance of the conflict. This thesis looks at

⁴¹ Anna Theofilopoulou, "The United Nations and Western Sahara: A Never-ending Affair," United States Institute of Peace, July 1, 2006, <http://www.usip.org/publications/the-united-nations-and-western-sahara-never-ending-affair>.

Moroccan lobbying in the U.S. Congress and the ability of the Moroccan government to frame the conflict in a way that aligns with U.S. interests and foreign policy.

E. METHODOLOGY

The questions raised in this thesis center on the conflict's contemporary phase, starting with the Cold War and explore the hypotheses as applied to three major periods: after the Cold War; the war on terrorism; and the Arab spring. Each of these periods brought a renewed interest in resolving the Western Sahara conflict and set in motion new political initiatives to resolve the dispute. While these developments had the potential to end the stalemate and produce an enduring solution, they were all in vain. This work analyzes three essential elements in this dynamic: the changing environments of the conflict and its implications; the effects of diplomacy; and causes for initiative failure.

F. ORGANIZATION

Following this introduction and literature review, Chapter II offers a brief outline of the conflict, summarizing the timeline of events in the current stalemate. Chapter III explores the role of the United Nations and MINURSO, while Chapter IV covers Algeria's domestic and regional politics. Chapter V analyzes the research findings of this thesis to understand how shortfalls and failures may be remedied.

II. CONFLICT OVERVIEW

Both sides of the Western Sahara conflict have made a tremendous effort to promote their positions in the international political arena. This chapter describes the geography of the Western Sahara, the social structure of the Sahrawi people, and the historical and political context of the disputed territory.

A. ORIENTATION

Western Sahara covers 103,000 square miles—an area as large as the state of Colorado. To the west are 690 miles of Atlantic coastline; to the north is Morocco; Algeria is east; and Mauritania is south. Morocco controls approximately 80 percent of Western Sahara, which it considers its southern provinces. The rest of the territory, which is fenced by 1,500 miles of sand dunes and defended by land mines, is under the authority of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), a separatist group created in 1976 to challenge Moroccan claims of sovereignty. The SADR government controls a population of roughly 50,000 people scattered in refugee camps in southwestern Algeria.

The population of Western Sahara does not exceed 500,000. Most live in El-Aaiun, Smara and Dakhla and most are Sahrawi, an ethnicity similar to the Tarfaya in Morocco, northern Mauritania and western Algeria. Almost all Sahrawi tribes speak the Hassaniah dialect and practice a predominantly Sunni branch of Maliki-rite Islam. The SADR claims that the Sahrawi are a distinct ethnic group, while Morocco classifies them among the many variations of Moroccan identity.

Aside from income from its alleged criminal activities, the SADR depends exclusively on the Algerian government for military, political, and financial aid. The end of the Cold War in 1991 dried up financial support from socialist/communist countries, and the overturning of the Gadhafi regime during the Arab Spring in 2011 eliminated a major supporter and donor. Algerian support has also become tight: plunging oil prices have left the Boutaflika regime unable to maintain previous funding levels for pro-SADR activities.

B. PHASES OF THE CONFLICT

The root cause of the Western Sahara conflict is a matter of perspective. The Moroccan regime sees it as one episode in a long Moroccan history. The separatists cite Morocco's annexation of the Spanish Sahara in 1976 as the flashpoint. This thesis looks at both claims, beginning with a broad history of the Moroccan regime, followed by a close description of the conflict from 1975 to present.

1. History Leading up to the Occupation

To understand the Western Sahara conflict from the Moroccan perspective requires analysis of cultural, religious, and political factors in North Africa. Morocco reaches back to pre-colonial history in justifying its claim on Western Sahara. It sees itself as an old state with an ancient culture and a history distinct from that of its neighbors. The monarchy, which has survived the occupation of two European powers, views the current cycle in its reign as a period of rising strength, territorial expansion, and regional hegemony. Morocco rejects the Western perspective of African history, which tends to ignore the pre-colonial past,⁴² and highlights the unique culture and chronicles of its people.

The Berber tribes of the Moroccan region maintained their identities from the pre-Roman era well into the 14th century. The three ancient Berber kingdoms of North Africa had differing approaches to diplomacy and war, which determined their histories. The Massylii kingdom of Carthage in Tunisia and the kingdom of Masaesyli (between Tunisia and the Moulouia River—that is, in today's Algeria), disappeared with the Arab invasion, but the Moorish kingdoms in Morocco survived. The tribes of Morocco chose strategically not to fight against Islamic campaigns in the middle ages, which allowed their culture and identity to ward off Arabic culture for millennia a millennium. The Moroccan tribes were also bypassed by the influence of Christian culture; the Rif, Middle, and High Atlas mountains provided a natural barrier to Western encroachment

⁴² C. R. Pennell, *From Empire to Independence*, 2nd Rev. ed. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 190.

from the north. These elements were crucial in the birth of Moroccan Amazigh nationalism, which would be exploited by a centuries of domestic dynasties.

To remain in power, the Amazighs effectively created Berber nationalism, supporting dynasties that resisted Arabic cultural hegemony by exploiting selected elements of Islam and adopting a variant of Islam that weakened the caliph in the Middle East. Thus the political history of Morocco since Islam has been one of tension between the Amazigh culture, which used Islam to assert its Berber identity, and an aggressive religion that sought to eradicate the pagan symbolism in Berber Islam. The effective Amazigh strategy was foundational in establishing a Moroccan state, and while eventually Arabs exercised a substantial role in politics, it was not until the 14th century that Arabic dynasties seized power from the Berbers.

Since its emergence from the Sahara in 1640, the Alaoui dynasty has weathered cycles of strength and weakness and a territory that expands and contracts. Research has shown that the Moroccan political establishment—the “Makhzen,” as it is called—survived through successive dynasties by using rent, force, religion, and nationalism as tools of political control, capitalizing on the opportunities of the day.

The Makhzen government has always been at the service of the monarch. In 789 AD, King Idriss II created the Makhzen in response to the Berber assassination of his father, Idriss I. Idriss II imported Arab mercenaries from Spain to create a militia that he could trust and depend on, organizing it into administrative and security elements. The use of the Makhzen and its organization became traditional. Subsequent dynasties enlisted the support of foreign militias with no Moroccan ties, and the Makhzen primarily employed Muslim and Christian mercenaries from the Iberian Peninsula and sub-Saharan Africa.

The Makhzen maintained a number of garrisons of Spanish fighters in Morocco. Christian-mercenary *farfanés* such as Reverter De La Guardia (d. circa 1142) and his sons⁴³ were among the notable Catalanian soldiers at the disposal of the Moroccan

⁴³ Michael Lower, “The Papacy and Christian Mercenaries of Thirteenth-Century North Africa,” *Speculum* 89, no. 3 (2014): 601–31, doi: 10.1017/S0038713414000761.

sultans as they expanded borders and suppressed internal threats. After the Spanish Inquisition in 1478, the Moroccan dynasties focused their efforts on their southern territories. To protect Morocco's main source of income, it was crucial that the Makhzen maintain control of trans-Saharan trade routes. Eventually, expansion of the Moroccan borders became necessary. With the help of the Christian militia, Morocco decimated the Shongai kingdom of Mali in 1590 in the battle of Tondibi⁴⁴ and extended its territory south to the Senegal River. From then to the 18th century, the king of Morocco appointed the governor of the Mali delta in Timbuktu— which is the foundation of Morocco's claim of sovereignty over the southern territories.

In the 15th century, the Spanish kings began to repatriate Christian militias serving Muslim rulers, and recruits from the Iberian Peninsula dwindled. Requiring a new source of foreign militias, the Sherifian empire turned to Africa. King Moulay Ismael, an Alaoui Sherifian sultan, recruited a legion of west Africans,⁴⁵ organizing them in highly trained infantry and cavalry units that allowed him to unify his territory, drive the Spanish out of Morocco, recapture Tangier from the British, take back Mauritania, and keep the Ottomans at bay. This “Black Guard” still exists today as the official guard of the Moroccan monarch.

Eventually, however, Morocco could no longer depend on mercenaries to constitute its army. First, Christians were no longer looking to Morocco for employment. Second, the sultan disbanded most of the Black Guard, who attempted to revolt.⁴⁶ Instead of strategically modernizing the military, the sultan relied on a few tribes to provide security in exchange for land and a portion of tax revenues. Morocco became a land of conflict between the Makhzen tribes (*blad el Makhzen*) and other tribes (*blad siba*). By the end of the 19th century, the sultan's control had weakened and the government was deeply decayed. Morocco's huge phase of expansion and reversed to contraction. The sultan practiced a strategy of dividing and conquering that allowed the Makhzen to

⁴⁴ Basil Davidson, *Africa in History: Themes and Outlines*, Rev. and Expanded ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 199–199.

⁴⁵ Marvine Howe, *Morocco: The Islamist Awakening and Other Challenges* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2005), 61–62.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 63–64.

survive; but the disfavored tribes rebelled and attacked European interests in Morocco, setting the stage for European colonization in the late 1800s.

Citing increasing unrest, the French and Spanish divided the Sherifian Empire into three territories in (1912). France promoted colonization to secure its territory, Algeria, which it had held for a century. To establish peace in western Algeria, France adopted a two-step strategy. First, the Algerian borders were pushed further west and south; then unrest was encouraged within Morocco, to the point where the central government could not resist France's promise of protection. France expanded Algeria's borders to include the oasis in the south and Gourara, Tidikelt, Saoura, and Tindouf in the west, carved out of Moroccan territory. This appropriation became the source of the Moroccan–Algerian War, or the Sand War, in 1963. The Spanish, meanwhile, established a colony north and west of the Rif Mountains and a southern territory that later became Western Sahara.

The European occupation of Morocco was brief. The French exiled the king to create a new regime, but inadvertently sparked a national unification movement that returned King Mohammed V and his family from exile. A two-year revolt culminated in the expulsion of the French and Spanish and independence in 1956. Soon, however, the tribes of the Rif Mountains, which had led the uprising, contested the rule of the king. In response, the king sent military forces and decisively suppressed the opposition. This marked the beginning of Morocco's formal claim of sovereignty over all territories it had controlled before the European occupation. The king could not make concessions to the Rif tribes for fear of reverberations throughout all the country's minority groups; he was forced therefore to pursue a policy of reigniting the old Moroccan religious and national identities that had been used by his predecessors in the Sherifian Empire. The Moroccan monarch revived his traditional role as a spiritual, military, popular, and tribal leader and successfully consolidated power. His assertion of control over Western Sahara reinforced his claims of authority.

2. Spanish Decolonization (1956–1976)

In 1959, France created Mauritania, effectively curbing Moroccan expansion, while Spain struggled to maintain direct control of Western Sahara. The United Nations General Assembly exacerbated tensions by pressuring Madrid to allow Western Sahara the option of self-determination.⁴⁷

King Hassan II of Morocco increased the regional and international political pressure on Spain in the early 1960s by recognizing Mauritania and reestablishing diplomatic relations with Algeria, which agreed to support Moroccan interests in the UN Special Committee of 1966, meeting in Addis Abeba.⁴⁸ In 1967, in an effort to control the outcome, Spain proposed a national referendum on self-government; Spain also created a legislative body composed of Western Sahara tribal leaders, the *Yema'*. In 1973, Spain offered the Sahrawi tribes a formal opportunity for limited self-government, and started the census of the population preparing for a referendum,⁴⁹ Morocco objected, calling for UN mediation⁵⁰ and International Court of Justice (ICJ) intervention and initiating a partition deal with Mauritania.⁵¹ On 13 December 1974, the Spanish general assembly approved Resolution 3292, requesting ICJ advisory opinions on two questions:

1. Was Western Sahara a territory belonging to no one (*terra nullius*) at the time of Spanish colonization?
2. What were the legal ties between this territory, the kingdom of Morocco, and the Mauritanian entity?⁵²

In May 1975, the ICJ halted the referendum on self-determination and deployed a UN fact-finding team to Western Sahara. After a wide-ranging visit, the team reported

⁴⁷ United Nations, General Assembly Resolution 2027(XX), 1965. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/217/90/IMG/NR021790.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁴⁸ Thomas M. Franck, "The Stealing of the Sahara," *American Journal of International Law*, 70, no.4 (October 1976): 702.

⁴⁹ Antonio Carro Martínez, "The Decolonization of the Sahara," *Review of Political Science* no.144 (March 1976): 17.

⁵⁰ Franck, "The Stealing of Sahara," 705.

⁵¹ János Besenyő, *Western Sahara* (Pécs: Publikon, 2009), 84.

⁵² International Court of Justice, Western Sahara Advisory Opinion of 16 October 1975, <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?sum=323&code=sa&p1=3&p2=4&case=61&k=69&p3=5>.

that the Sahrawi desired a sovereign state independent of Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania alike.⁵³ On 16 October 1975, the ICJ returned a negative verdict on question one: the territory of Western Sahara had not been terra nullis. Spain was able to convince the ICJ that Madrid had ruled over the Western Sahara through agreements with local tribal leaders⁵⁴ since 1885, and the ICJ dismissed Morocco and Mauritania's claims of authority.⁵⁵ However, in answer to question two, the ICJ recognized ties of allegiance between Saharan nomadic tribes and the Moroccan monarch. The ICJ concluded:

Thus the Court has not found legal ties of such a nature as might affect the application of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) in the decolonization of Spanish Sahara and, in particular, of the principle of self-determination through the free and genuine expression of the will of the peoples of the Territory.⁵⁶

Since historical allegiances were the foundation of the monarchy's claims, Hassan II interpreted the ICJ ruling in his favor, concluding that the ICJ provided legal grounds to integrate Western Sahara without benefit of a referendum. In 1976, he deployed 350,000 civilians on the "Green March," a strategic 30-km, peaceful walk from Tarfaya, in southwestern Morocco, to Western Sahara.⁵⁷

Saudi Arabia financed the Green March, while France and the U.S. provided logistical support and diplomatic cover. The Spanish government, in turmoil at the impending death of Franco, was caught off guard. Facing the reality that it would have to decolonize eventually, Spain sought to avoid military confrontation and lobbied to save face⁵⁸ by letting the Green March advance into Spanish territory while hoping for a resolution in the UN condemning it; but France and the U.S. defended Morocco's position causing Spain to lose the political battle in the UN and liberate Western Sahara.

⁵³ Besenyö, *Western Sahara*, 82.

⁵⁴ International Court of Justice, *Western Sahara*, 1975.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Franck, "The Stealing of Sahara," 711.

⁵⁸ Francisco Villar, *The Self-Determination Process of the Sahara* (Valencia, Spain: F. Torres, 1982), 332, 339–340.

On 6 November 1975, the Green March arrived within yards of the Spanish military's defensive positions.⁵⁹ Prince Juan Carlos, who was within days of ascending the Spanish throne, had no leadership or military experience and wished to avoid escalation. Citing political and economic hardships, prime minister Arias Navarro recommended an amicable agreement and, outmaneuvered, Juan Carlos ordered his troops to retreat. On 14 November 1975, both governments signed the Spanish Accords, in which Spain relinquished its sovereignty over Western Sahara in favor of both Morocco and Mauritania. The treaty invoked the involvement of the UN, which struggled to balance the Western Saharan quest for independence with this transfer of authority.

The new treaty did not initially gain the support of the Yema'a; 67 of its 102 members called to dissolve the council and rallied to elect the POLISARIO Front as sole representative of the Sahrawi people.⁶⁰ Eventually, Morocco and Mauritania secured a razor-thin majority in the Yema'a. On 26 February 1976, 57 members of the assembly voted in favor of the Spanish Accord, ending 91 years of colonial rule.⁶¹ King Hassan II had succeeded in forcing Spain to hand over Western Sahara without firing a shot. The Moroccan government had won—but the conflict was just beginning.

3. The Ceasefire (1976–1991)

In 1976, King Hassan II incorporated Western Sahara as Morocco's southern territories and began to consolidate power. To eliminate any potential POLISARIO threat, Hassan launched an immediate military offensive against the residual anti-Spanish insurgency. The operation was brutal, inflicting serious casualties and forcing thousands of Sahrawi refugees into the Tindouf region of neighboring Algeria.⁶²

The POLISARIO Front proved very resilient and managed to gain the financial support of Algeria. More important, it formed a Sahrawi government in exile that secured the recognition of the Algerian president, Boumediene. Algerian support became a

⁵⁹ Besenyö, *Western Sahara*, 90.

⁶⁰ Tony Hodges, "The Western Sahara File," *Third World Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (January 1984): 97.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Tomás Barbulo, *La Historia Prohibida del Sahara Español* (Barcelona: Destino, 2002), 284.

serious asset for the POLISARIO Front and Sahrawi separatist movement.⁶³ Besides financing refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria's petrodollars provided the POLISARIO Front with access to sophisticated weaponry, with which they fended off Moroccan and Mauritanian forces for fifteen years.

The POLISARIO Front employed guerilla tactics, carrying out well-executed raids before retreating to camps in Algeria. Morocco was forced to develop a defensive strategy in the form of a berm equipped with surveillance instruments and protected by an extensive minefield as a buffer zone. By this means, Morocco maintained control of 80 percent of Western Sahara and negated the POLISARIO's tactical advantage.

4. The Present (1992–2016)

While Algeria offered strong support to the POLISARIO Front and Sahrawi separatists,⁶⁴ Morocco received substantial financial, political, and military support from its foreign allies. Saudi Arabia and the U.S. financed the construction of the berm and other endeavors that reinforced Morocco's upper hand.⁶⁵ In addition to equipment, France provided direct military support,⁶⁶ repeatedly attacking separatist strongholds⁶⁷ and providing air cover for a number of Moroccan military operations.

By 1988, the conflict was at a stalemate. Morocco couldn't decisively win the war without destroying insurgent retreats in Algerian territory, and the POLISARIO's guerilla tactics were useless against the berm. With the global communist threat ending, the time was ripe for negotiations. Initially, the Organization of African Unity, an entity largely created and financed by the Libyan government, attempted to broker a peace deal on many occasions, but in vain—Morocco distrusted the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and Gadhafi, who had supported the POLISARIO from its inception. Acknowledging the window of opportunity created by the fall of the USSR, the United

⁶³ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 9.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Nations intervened;⁶⁸ Secretary General Pérez de Cellar resuscitated OAU proposals and reintroduced the option of a referendum on self-determination. His efforts were well received: both parties agreed, and in September 1991, Morocco and the POLISARIO announced a ceasefire. But the political war was just beginning.

The U.N. Security Council proposal was simple. Resolution 690 (1991) tasked the United Nations Mission for the Organization of a Referendum in the Western Sahara⁶⁹ (MINURSO) to identify all voters eligible to participate in a referendum on the question of integrating Western Sahara into Morocco or becoming an independent state.⁷⁰ MINURSO proposed to employ the Spanish census of 1974 to create a voter roll. Morocco objected to use of the census, claiming that 130,000 Sahrawi voters had not been counted and that a few nomadic tribes had been migrating north into Moroccan territory and were not represented. The POLISARIO Front rejected Morocco's claim, and once again negotiations stalled.⁷¹

During the following decade, Morocco and the POLISARIO Front spent tremendous political capital to mold an electorate that would decide the future of the Western Sahara according to their vision. The rebels threatened violence as the UN worked to preserve the brokered ceasefire. In December 1996, the secretary general invoked the help of an international political heavyweight, former U.S. secretary of state James Baker, to reignite the extinguished negotiations.

Baker created a lifeline by proposing in the Houston Accords of September 1997 to recount the voters and implement the previously proposed referendum. Accordingly, MINURSO performed a recount, based largely on the 1974 census, and in January 2000, provided the UN with a list of 86,386 voters.⁷² Morocco rejected the list and submitted

⁶⁸ The Settlement Plan is contained in UN Security Council document S/22464, April 19, 1991.

⁶⁹ UN SC Resolution 690 (1991), April 29, 1991, <https://documents-ddsny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/596/26/IMG/NR059626.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁷⁰ Alexis Arieff, *Western Sahara* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 2012).

⁷¹ Andrew G. Lewis, *A Disappearing Right to Self Determination: The Ongoing Impasse in Western Sahara* (Boston: The Fletcher School, Tufts University, 2010), 15.

⁷² Crisis Group, *Western Sahara: Out of The Impasse*, Middle East/North Africa Report 66, June 11, 2007, 2, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/western-sahara/066-western-sahara-out-of-the-impasse.aspx>.

130,000 appeals⁷³ on behalf of Sahrawi living in Western Sahara but allegedly uncounted. Baker's first attempt had failed. In February 2000, Secretary General Kofi Anan called on Baker to explore alternatives⁷⁴ for what he described as "an early, durable and agreed resolution of the dispute."⁷⁵ The negotiations had hit a snag with the death of Hassan II and ascension of Mohamed VI, in 1999; Mohamed rejected any concept of a referendum. Nevertheless, Baker came up with the "Framework Agreement on the Status of Western Sahara"⁷⁶ (Baker Plan I), that would grant Western Sahara autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.

In June 2001, the secretary general submitted Baker Plan I to the UN. It offered the POLISARIO the possibility of forming a regional government in Western Sahara capable of governing all functions except foreign affairs, defense, and security, which would be administered by the Moroccan government. Furthermore, the proposal stipulated that the Western Sahara would be governed for five years by a legislative body elected by the voters in the MINURSO list; thereafter, the fate of Western Sahara would be decided by referendum. Morocco welcomed Baker I. It did not provide an independence option and allowed all adult residents⁷⁷ of Western Sahara to vote, including the additional 130,000 additional Sahrawi claimed by Morocco. The POLISARIO, which found the plan too favorable to Moroccan interests, rejected Baker Plan I.⁷⁸

The Security Council was back to square one, but determined to press on. In July 2002, it instructed Baker to push for further negotiations.⁷⁹ Driven by Moroccan and

⁷³ United Nations, Security Council Extends Minurso Mandate Until 31 May, Adopting Resolution 1292 (2000) Unanimously (29 February 2000), <http://www.un.org/press/en/2000/20000229.sc6812.doc.html>.

⁷⁴ Anna Theofilopoulou, *The United Nations and Western Sahara: A Never-ending Affair*, Special Report 166 (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, July 2006), 8, <http://www.usip.org/publications/united-nations-and-western-sahara-never-ending-affair>.

⁷⁵ U.N. Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2001/613), June 20, 2001, <http://www.arso.org/S-2001-613.htm>.

⁷⁶ Ibid., Annex I.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group, *Western Sahara*, 3.

⁷⁸ Theofilopoulou, *United Nations and Western Sahara*, 9.

⁷⁹ United Nations Security Council (SC) Resolution 1429, July 2002.

POLISARIO motivation to reach a compromise, in May 2003, Baker revealed a second plan. Baker Plan II, The “Peace Plan for Self-Determination of the People of Western Sahara,” proposed a four-year, temporary self-government represented by the Sahrawi identified in the MINURSO census. At the end of this period, a final referendum for those who had resided in Western Sahara since 30 December 1999 would determine the future of the territory. Unlike Baker I, Baker II included a mechanism that curbed Morocco’s potential control over Sahrawi self-government; it also allowed the Sahrawi to choose independence or full integration into Moroccan territory.⁸⁰ The plan received international approval and in July 2003 seemed to have a real shot at ending the conflict. Without exception, every member nation of the UN supported the plan; even Algeria and the POLISARIO Front were in favor. In July, the UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 1495, and an end to the Western Sahara conflict seemed in sight. Yet in April 2004, Morocco refused the proposal and appealed to France and the U.S. for political support in the UN. Protecting its interests in Morocco, France came to the rescue and blocked the resolution, saving the Moroccan government from potential international sanctions.

Experts criticized Morocco for walking away from a deal that every nation had endorsed.⁸¹ They argued that Morocco had learned a cautionary lesson from observing East Timor’s self-determination experience, which ended with its secession from Indonesia in 1999, and that Morocco had never intended to grant the POLISARIO Front a real shot at autonomy. James Baker was at wit’s end, having failed to bring the parties to agreement despite ingenious diplomacy. The UN’s inability to sanction Morocco exacerbated Baker’s frustration and led to his resignation in July 2004.

After three years of stalled progress, Morocco proposed a new self-government initiative in April 2007 that would enable “the Saharan population to manage its own affairs freely, democratically in full respect of the sovereignty of the kingdom of

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Lewis, *Disappearing Right of Self Determination*, 17.

Morocco and its national integrity.”⁸² This plan was well received by the Bush administration; undersecretary of state Nicholas Burns called it “a serious and credible plan.” In the Obama administration, secretary of state Hillary Clinton declared it “serious, realistic, and credible—a potential approach to satisfy the aspirations of the people in the Western Sahara to run their own affairs in peace and dignity.”⁸³

The POLISARIO countered with a proposal that included a self-determination option. Morocco rejected the offer and fruitless negotiations continued through 2008⁸⁴ and 2009. In November 2010, Morocco saw what some consider the real beginning of the Arab Spring, when pro-separatists in camp Gdam Izik, near El Aiun,⁸⁵ organized demonstrations that aroused a violent response from Moroccan security forces. The ensuing clash led to twelve civilian fatalities and dozens of injuries, evoking international condemnation,⁸⁶ but no sanctions against the Moroccan regime. In April 2012, the MINURSO proposed enlarging its mandate to include protection for human rights.⁸⁷ As usual, France blocked the motion,⁸⁸ limiting potential pressure on Morocco.

The conflict persists today, though the new democratic Moroccan constitution, passed in July 2011, includes a system of self-government and decentralization, “regionalisation avancée,” for Western Sahara. Meanwhile, Morocco has made a serious effort to invest in and develop the disputed territory. On the fortieth anniversary of the

⁸² Anna Theofilopoulou, Letter dated April 11, 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/MINURSO%20S2007206.pdf>.

⁸³ U.S. State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri,” March 23, 2011, <http://www.humanrights.gov/dyn/secretary-clinton-remarks-with-moroccan-foreign-minister-taieb-fassi-fihri.html>.

⁸⁴ Patrick Worsnip, “U.N. Envoy Calls Sahara Independence Unrealistic,” *Reuters AlertNet*, April 21, 2008, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N21382839.htm>.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2012: Morocco and Western Sahara*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/morocco-and-western-sahara>.

⁸⁶ U.S. Department of State’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011 to the United States Congress, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>.

⁸⁷ UN SC Resolution 2044 (2012), April 24, 2012, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2044\(2012\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2044(2012)).

⁸⁸ Alexis Arieff, *Morocco: Current Issues* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 23, 2011), 18, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/158517.pdf>.

Green March, Mohammed IV launched regional projects worth \$1.8 billion dollars,⁸⁹ designed to bring the infrastructure of the southern territories in line with the rest of the nation.

⁸⁹ Aziz El Yaakoubi, "Morocco launches \$1.8 bln West Sahara investment plan," *Reuters Africa*, February 5, 2016, <http://af.reuters.com/article/moroccoNews/idAFL8N15K3T1?sp=true>.

III. PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE UN

The third hypothesis suggests that the Western Sahara conflict continues because of the UN's failure to act. Though the IJC found the Moroccan annexation illegal and the UN can force Morocco to withdraw from Western Sahara, the United Nations Security Council has failed to act.

The United Nations' mandate is to promote peace, security, human rights, and economic and social development.⁹⁰ With 193 member states, the UN acts mainly through the general assembly (UNGA), security council (UNSC), and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Under the UN charter, the UNSC is responsible for matters of peace and security, and its decisions are consequential. Unyielding governments usually face international sanctions or military action.

The integrity of the UN is vital to world peace and stability. The UN should be an honest broker and impartial intermediary, never using its mechanisms to benefit powerful member states. In today's hyper-connected world a functional cooperative body is needed to help secure a prosperous future for all.

A great deal has been written on the role of the UN and international community in the Western Sahara conflict. Some denounce France and the U.S. for their influence in favor of Morocco, pointing to the money Morocco spends on high-powered Washington lobbyists.⁹¹ Others criticize Morocco for obstructing MINURSO, accusing the Sharifian government of having played waiting games "until the UN ran out of patience or money or both."⁹² This chapter examines whether the UN, through the UNSC, has fulfilled its mandate in dealing with the dispute.

⁹⁰ United Nations Security Council, "Functions and Powers," accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/about/functions.shtml>.

⁹¹ Eliza Barkley, and Kristen Chick, Comments on "The \$20 Million Case for Morocco," *Foreign Policy*, February 25, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/25/the-20-million-case-for-morocco/>.

⁹² William J. Durch, "Building on Sand: UN Peacekeeping in the Western Sahara." *International Security* 17, no. 4 (1993): 418–19.

A. SPAIN AND INSURGENCY

The UN championed the mid-1900s wave of decolonization in third-world former colonies, issuing the United Nations Colony Declaration in 1955.⁹³ As expected, the occupying states resisted this initiative. In North Africa, Spain occupied several strips of land that were important to its economic and strategic interests. UN diplomatic pressure was relentless, however, ultimately causing Spain to liberate Western Sahara.⁹⁴

During this period, anti-Spanish organizations, inspired by leftist and pan-Arab⁹⁵ ideologies, bloomed in the region, notably, the Saharan Liberation Organization (MLS-Harakat Tahrir Saguia el-Hamra wa Oued ed-Dahab). However, brutal suppression by the Spanish in 1973 pushed the MLS to morph into a violent insurgency known as the POLISARIO Front (Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Saguia El-Hamra y Rio de Oro).⁹⁶ This armed guerrilla group targeted Spanish economic interests and infrastructure in Western Sahara, perpetrating violence, kidnappings, and executions that aroused international attention.

In 1975, the UN launched an investigation of the unrest⁹⁷ and, after receiving a lengthy report, recognized the POLISARIO Front's struggle for liberation while stopping short of further action on behalf of the Sahrawi people. It was not until 1961 that a UN decolonization committee was able to place Western Sahara on the UN agenda, and the UN did not issue a resolution urging Spain to decolonize until 1964. Morocco supported this resolution and stood for the Sahrawi's right of self-determination—ironically, in light

⁹³ Besenyő. *Western Sahara*, 64

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁹⁵ André Bank, and Bas Van Heur, "Transnational Conflicts and the Politics of Scalar Networks: Evidence from Northern Africa," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2007): 602.

⁹⁶ Anthony G. Pazzanita, "Review of *Endgame in the Western Sahara: What Future for Africa's Last Colony?*" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 38, no.3 (2015): 574–76, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40033991>.

⁹⁷ Tony Hodges, *Western Sahara: The Roots of a Desert War* (Westport, CT: L. Hill, 1983), 161.

of subsequent events. In December 1966, the UN passed Resolution 2229 (XXI),⁹⁸ forcing calling upon Spain to conclude its occupation of Ifni and Western Sahara.

Spain resisted UN pressure and explored means to maintain control. In 1966, the UN received 800 declarations from Western Sahara tribal leaders employed by the Spanish, claiming that the people wished to remain under Spanish rule.⁹⁹ Aware of Spain's antics, the UN did not object to Spain's involvement in political affairs of the Western Sahara so long as a plan for a referendum was in the works. The Spanish government allowed the Sahrawi congress, Jema'a, to establish a legislative body and then, to further its agenda, sponsored another political party, the Saharan National Unity Party (PUNS).¹⁰⁰ Finally, in 1975, Spain concluded a census of Western Sahara and announced it would hold a referendum.

Fearing a negative outcome, Hassan II of Morocco sabotaged the Spanish plan by invoking ICJ intervention, which required the UN to suspend the process.¹⁰¹ Resolution 3292 (XXIX)¹⁰² was issued, blocking the referendum pending the high court's decision, and a UN investigative diplomatic delegation was sent to Western Sahara, Madrid, Rabat, and Nouakchott.¹⁰³ This expedition proved a turning point for the Spanish in Western Sahara.

In preparation for the UN delegation, the Western Sahara governor, General Gomez de Salazar, directed his security forces to prevent any sabotage by insurgents. The security forces banned all known anti-colonial activists from traveling to potential diplomatic destinations. Gomez assembled huge crowds to welcome the diplomats at the airport and placed them along the road to Laayoune city center to wave Spanish flags and

⁹⁸ UN General Assembly, Resolution 2221 (XXI), "Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space," December 5, 1966, <https://documents-ddsny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/005/24/IMG/NR000524.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁹⁹ John Mercer, *Spanish Sahara* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1976), 235.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 243, 244.

¹⁰¹ Hodges, *Western Sahara*, 201–205.

¹⁰² UN General Assembly, Resolution 3292 (XXIX), "Definition of Aggression General Assembly Resolution 3314 (XXIX)," December 14, 1974, <http://legal.un.org/avl/ha/da/da.html>.

¹⁰³ Mercer, *Spanish Sahara*, 242–343.

pro-POLISARIO banners. However, this propaganda stunt backfired. Instead of waving pro-Spanish colors, the crowd hailed the convoy in a riot of POLISARIO colors.¹⁰⁴ The tremendous turnouts at every site shocked the Spanish governor and embarrassed Madrid. This expression of anti-Spanish sentiment infuriated the homeland Spanish constituency, increasing pressure on the already fragile government of the ailing General Franco.

POLISARIO National Union Party (PUNS) leaders were as stunned as their Spanish sponsors. Once it became clear that Spain had lost control, the PUNS jumped ship; the most influential man in the party, Khalienna Ould Rashid, and his allies turned on Spain, declaring allegiance to the king of Morocco.¹⁰⁵ Amid the confusion, the UN commission continued its visit in accordance to plan. Rabat, Algiers, and Nouakchott echoed their unified support for Sahrawi rights of self-determination. The final report presented by the UN diplomats concluded that

the co-operation with Spanish authorities allowed the Commission to visit every major center in spite of the very limited timeframe at its disposal and collect information on the position of local population. Everywhere the Commission went was met with political mass demonstrations. The Commission had meetings with the representatives of all of the communities of the Sahara. All this made the Commission clearly understand that there is a major agreement among the people of the Sahara on the issue of independence.¹⁰⁶

Spain's diplomatic failure improved Morocco's position. The UN recognized the Sahara Arabic Democratic Republic (SADR) and, mindful of Morocco's manipulations, began to supervise a transfer of power.

B. MOROCCAN OBSTRUCTIONISM

Morocco has always meddled in the affairs of Western Sahara, and with these new developments, pursued a dynamic waiting game, adjusting its strategy and tools of obstruction brilliantly in response to new developments. In *The Western Sahara*, Janos Besenyó discusses some of Morocco's covert operations.

¹⁰⁴ Hodges, *Western Sahara*, 199.

¹⁰⁵ Mercer, *Spanish Sahara*, 242–343.

¹⁰⁶ Besenyó, *Western Sahara*, 81.

1. Sponsorship of a Militia

Besenyó reports that the Moroccan government orchestrated, financed, and directed several anti-Spanish insurgencies before the UN visit to Western Sahara in 1975. He presents evidence implicating Morocco in the creation of the Movement for Free Unification (Frente de Liberación y de la Unidad-FLU), which wreaked havoc on Spanish targets, Sahrawi civilians, and POLISARIO strongholds.¹⁰⁷

2. ICJ Intervention

Morocco's "obstruction while waiting" can also be observed in the ICJ intervention. Besenyó explains that the insurgency forced Spain to increase its military footprint, which sparked Morocco to mobilize 25,000 troops to its border in response. The UN feared an escalation to war, but hoped that Spanish negotiations with the POLISARIO, PUNS, and Jema'a would deliver a peaceful transfer of power.¹⁰⁸ Unbeknown to Spain, Morocco had already struck a secret land-division deal with Mauritania. When Spain and the POLISARIO agreed to a referendum, Hassan II invoked ICJ intervention, forcing the election's postponement.¹⁰⁹

3. The Green March

Morocco stunned the international community with the Green March,¹¹⁰ but the world was more surprised by the UN's response than by the march itself. Though the UN had previously recognized Sahrawi efforts towards liberation, it stopped short of issuing a statement, asking all parties "to avoid any unilateral step or any other action which would aggravate the situation."¹¹¹ Morocco had capitalized on Spain's weak foreign policy through the Green March, which forced Franco's government to negotiate. On 11 November, Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania signed the Madrid Accord. The PUNS was

¹⁰⁷ Besenyó, *Western Sahara*, 83.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹¹⁰ Norrie MacQueen, *United Nations Peacekeeping in Africa since 1960* (London: Longman, 2002), 236.

¹¹¹ Erik Jensen, *Western Sahara: Anatomy of a Stalemate?* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012), 169.

compelled to sign the treaty because it was the only party representing the Sahrawi that is recognized by the UN and the international community. The UN, which had insisted in its resolution that “the views of the Saharan population, expressed through Jema’, will be respected,” had to ratify the treaty.¹¹² The POLISARIO Front, however, rejected the accord, forcing the dissolution of the PUNS two weeks later. Perplexed, the UN passed two conflicting resolutions: in Resolution 3458/A, it reaffirmed the right of the Sahrawi to freedom and self-determination; in Resolution 3458/B, it endorsed the Madrid Accord, calling on all signatories, including the PUNS, to respect the terms of the treaty.¹¹³ While the UN was sifting through what had happened in Western Sahara, Morocco extended its forces over the entire territory.

4. Security Reinforcements

In March 1976, The UN appointed a delegation to gather a first-hand account of the newly liberated territory and the camps in Tindouf. The decision was ill received by both Rabat and Nouakchott; they considered the UN’s finding provocative and denied entry to the diplomats. Consequently, the POLISARIO resumed its violence, targeting Moroccan and Mauritanian assets. The assaults advanced into the Mauritanian capital and extended within Morocco in TanTan, Jdiria, and Guelta-Zemmour.¹¹⁴

The Moroccan military met the confrontation with brutal force, fending off the POLISARIO raids. Mauritania, by contrast, was ill prepared to take the offensive. Under siege, the Mauritanian president vainly requested UN intervention. France, with which it had the strongest ties, refused involvement; but as the POLISARIO targeted French companies in Mauritania and killed and kidnapped French citizens, France was inevitably drawn into the conflict.¹¹⁵

Domestic pressures forced French president Giscard d’Estaing to take action. Without a UN resolution, France organized a military campaign to prevent any future

¹¹² Hodges, *Western Sahara*, 235–237.

¹¹³ Christopher O. Quaye, *Liberation Struggles in International Law* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 177.

¹¹⁴ Hodges, *Western Sahara*, 244.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 243–244.

POLISARIO threat to French assets and citizens in Mauritania, forcing the POLISARIO to release the hostages and cease targeting French interests. The POLISARIO Front was forced to reevaluate its tactics.

Learning from its battles, the POLISARIO refocused its strategy to avoid clashing with the French military. The rebels waged a sophisticated campaign against Nouakchott that drained its economy, forcing Mauritania to retreat from its newly acquired territories. On 5 August 1979, Mauritania and the POLISARIO concluded a peace treaty sponsored by Algeria, in which Mauritania recognized the POLISARIO and agreed to relinquish territorial claims to Western Sahara.¹¹⁶ Within 72 hours, however, Morocco heavily reinforced its troops in Dakhla, recapturing the abandoned territory.¹¹⁷

In Morocco, the POLISARIO relied on Algeria to carry out its heavy campaigns. Successful operations such as the Boumedienne offensive in January 1979 inflicted heavy losses in lives and valuable equipment, including four helicopters and F5 fighter jet.¹¹⁸

It was not until the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* exposed Morocco's use of U.S. equipment against civilian populations that Americans and the world paid attention. Facing domestic criticism, the U.S. Congress froze military aid to the Sharifian kingdom. This seemed to have little effect on Morocco's vigor, however, as Hassan quickly found a new weapons supplier in the apartheid regime of the South African Republic.¹¹⁹

Later in 1979, the UN recognized the POLISARIO and urged Morocco to withdraw its military.¹²⁰ Instead the Moroccan regime increased belligerence, launching several ferocious offensives—notably, Task Force Ohud. In November 1979, General Dlimi deployed 7,000 troops under flocks of F5s and Mirages and the best of Morocco's

¹¹⁶ David J. Dean, *The Air Force Role in Low-intensity Conflict* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1986), 42.

¹¹⁷ Hodges, *Western Sahara*, 276.

¹¹⁸ Dean, *Air Force Role*, 41.

¹¹⁹ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 20.

¹²⁰ Hodges, *Western Sahara*, 292.

anti-insurgent units, which he had created specifically for the conflict. These indigenous units were very effective—they had a stake in the conflict as descendants of tribes that traditionally rivaled those tribes supporting the POLISARIO.¹²¹

The Moroccan regime intensified its diplomatic efforts and in 1980, Hassan II secured the support of the UN's most influential states, while recognition of the SADR persisted mainly in third-world countries. Domestically, Hassan's power consolidation began. He erected governmental institutions, launched population-resettlement projects, and subsidized food and services, minimizing security concerns by constructing a berm, bristling with barbed wire, ditches, and land mines, from Guerguerat to Nouadhibou in Mauritania.¹²²

5. Questions of Voter Eligibility

The berm was a good investment, allowing Morocco to secure an effective defensive position and ride out the stalemate. Nearly a decade later, the UN renewed negotiations. In early 1989, Morocco's decision to negotiate a settlement with the POLISARIO encouraged the international community. The UN approved two resolutions, 158/90 and 160/90 to broker the ceasefire and launch MINURSO¹²³

The mandate of the MINURSO was to conduct a referendum based on the 1974 Spanish census. However, Morocco maintained that Spain had missed some Sahrawi—that 130,000 nomads were not represented, and that Bedouins related to the Sahrawi in Tindouf, should have a voice in deciding the fate of their land.¹²⁴ MINURSO representative Johannes Manz rejected this claim, but secretary general Javier Perez Decullar supported Morocco's position, causing the UN special representative to resign.¹²⁵ With Manz out, Morocco's support increased and at the end of Javier Decullar's tenure gained a tremendous edge in the person of his replacement, Boutros

¹²¹ Dean, *Air Force Role*, 44–46.

¹²² Besenyő, *Western Sahara*, 125.

¹²³ Ibid., 131.

¹²⁴ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 211–214.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 196.

Boutros-Ghali, an Egyptian friend of the Moroccan regime. Under Boutros-Ghali's influence, the UN decided to consider the Moroccan position, postponing the preparations for a referendum in 1992. The POLISARIO denounced the decision, threatening a return to war. In August 1994, the MINURSO was compelled to resume voter registration, only to suspend it two months later. Morocco obstructed the process by restricting access to the Sahrawi population¹²⁶ and accusing the POLISARIO of including sub-Saharan mercenaries in the census. The referendum effort was delayed until September 1997, when the UN reengaged both parties in Houston, Texas.¹²⁷

6. Claims of Sovereignty

The Houston Agreement reaffirmed the UN's 1991 peace plan. This time, the UN enlisted former U.S. secretary of state James Baker as special envoy. Initially, his efforts were successful; he was able to bring delegations from both parties to Portugal to negotiate directly and MINURSO's mission resumed in 1998. However, the Moroccan authorities demanded that the UN consider four matters:

1. In 1884, after the town of Dakhla was taken by the Spanish, several hundred locals from the tribe of Oulad Slim fled to Moroccan territories.
2. When in 1919 the town of Tarfaya was occupied by Spanish troops led by Colonel Penez, most of the inhabitants of the region fled to Morocco.
3. In 1934, when the Spanish established their first garrison in Layoune, several Saharawi moved to areas under Moroccan rule.
4. As a result of Operation Ecouvillon, conducted by the French army in 1958, many Saharawi fought among Moroccan insurgents while their families lived in Moroccan territory.¹²⁸

Morocco failed to make a decisive case to the UN, which rejected its claims; but meanwhile negotiations had been suspended so that the issues might be addressed, an outcome favorable to Morocco's interests. This cycle was repeated a dozen times.

¹²⁶ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 200–204.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 205.

¹²⁸ Besenyő, *Western Sahara*, 135.

Finally, James Baker proposed a plan whereby Morocco would offer increased autonomy and after five years conduct a referendum.¹²⁹ The plan proposed the participation of everyone who had lived in the area within the past thirty years. The Moroccans favored the plan, but not the POLISARIO. Negotiations stalled with the death of Hassan II in July 1999. As his successor, Mohammed VI, consolidated power through popular democratic measures, his domestic support strengthened—along with his bargaining position in the conflict.¹³⁰

In 2003, James Baker presented Baker Plan II, which the UNSC approved. However, the U.S. threatened to use its veto power to block the measure.¹³¹ Since then, the impotent MINURSO mandate has been extended every year. The new Moroccan monarch's stance has hardened, and now Morocco will not negotiate on two issues: unification and sovereignty. It has insisted on either autonomy under the Moroccan crown or nothing.¹³²

MINURSO remains one of the few UN peacekeeping missions operating without a human-rights mandate. In a letter to the UN Human Rights Watch, Middle East and North Africa Division, MINURSO members called on the UNSC to uphold a “sustained, independent, and impartial monitoring” role for the organization, underscoring the failure of current mechanisms to meet an impartial standard and calling for expansion of its mandate to include monitoring of human-rights and abuses by all parties.

Several unsuccessful attempts have been made to promote human-rights protections. As recently as 2013, the U.S. drafted a proposal to the UNSC that incorporated such an element, but when Morocco objected on the grounds that the initiative would undermine its sovereignty, the U.S. backtracked.

¹²⁹ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 223.

¹³⁰ Anthony H. Cordesman, *A Tragedy of Arms: Military and Security Developments in the Maghreb* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 67.

¹³¹ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 225.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 220.

C. U.S. AND FRENCH FAVORITISM

France and America have supported Morocco's position since the beginning of the Western Sahara conflict. U.S. support to Morocco solidified during the Green March, while France's position has evolved over the years. Neutral at first, the French stood with Algeria in support of the POLISARIO before becoming staunch Moroccan supporters.¹³³

France and the U.S. both facilitated the Green March, France providing the bulk of the logistical expertise and the U.S. supplying C130s to transport civilian participants from Morocco.¹³⁴ Since then, France has been a major arms supplier, second only to the United States, which increased its foreign military sales (FMS) to Morocco from \$8.2 million in 1974 to \$242 in 1976.¹³⁵ Between 2009 and 2014, Morocco secured \$108 million in military aid,¹³⁶ becoming the second-largest beneficiary in the African continent, after Egypt.¹³⁷ The U.S. turns a blind eye to Morocco's illegal weapons use—though the U.S. Arms Export Control Act and a 1960 U.S.–Moroccan military agreement forbid the use of U.S. weapons beyond Morocco's recognized borders,¹³⁸ Morocco employs these sophisticated weapons in Western Sahara.

The most critical support that Morocco draws is French and American diplomatic cover in the UN;¹³⁹ these nations have prevented the UNSC from imposing any sanctions against Morocco.¹⁴⁰ In 2009, 2010, and 2014, France blocked proposed resolutions giving MINURSO a human-rights component, defending its position by claiming Algerian manipulation and uses of the issue to undermine Morocco.

¹³³ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 77–79.

¹³⁴ Hodges, *Western Sahara*, 213.

¹³⁵ Gerald J. Bender, James Smoot Coleman, and Richard L Sklar, eds., *African Crisis Areas and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1985), 265, ProQuest ebrary.

¹³⁶ Seth Binder, "A Walk Through U.S. Arms Sales and Aid to Operation Decisive Storm Countries," Security Assistance Monitor, April 10, 2015, <http://securityassistance.org/blog/walk-through-us-arms-sales-and-aid-operation-decisive-storm-countries>.

¹³⁷ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 66–67.

¹³⁸ Hodges, *Western Sahara*, 356.

¹³⁹ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 60.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 29, 60, 140.

The U.S. also uses its influence in favor of Morocco.¹⁴¹ In 2013, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged the Security Council to implement a “sustained” and independent mechanism to monitor human rights in the Western Sahara, which prompted the U.S. to propose an update of the MINURSO mandate accordingly. As soon as it learned of the motion, however, Rabat canceled planned U.S.–Moroccan military exercises, thus suspending its security cooperation. In consequence, the U.S. backtracked and dismissed the drafted resolution.

French and American diplomatic support extends beyond the UN. In the Obama administration, a majority of the House of Representatives signed letters calling on the president to endorse Morocco's proposal of Western Sahara autonomy under Moroccan auspices. This congressional involvement suggests the extent of Moroccan lobbying in Washington.¹⁴²

Support for Morocco in the U.S. and France is anticipated to grow in light of recent events in Europe and North Africa. Moroccan intelligence supplied the tip-off that led to the apartment in Saint Denis where the French police captured Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the jihadist behind the 13 November attacks in Paris.¹⁴³ This cooperation demonstrated the value of alliance with Morocco and elevated Morocco's bargaining power in the Western Sahara conflict.

D. INEFFECTUAL PEACEKEEPING

The demand for state building and peacekeeping operations has increased in the face of the current fluid threat. The ever-expanding mandates of the UN PKOs missions combined with the nature of the new post-9/11 threats make it necessary for the PKOs to

¹⁴¹ F. Ugboaja Ohaegbulam, “Western Sahara: Lines in the Sand,” review of *Western Sahara: Anatomy of a Stalemate* by Eric Jensen; *Endgame in the Western Sahara: What Future for Africa's Last Colony?* by Toby Shelley, *African Studies Review* 49, no. 2 (2006):193–201, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20065246>.

¹⁴² Eliza Barkley, and Kristen Chick, Comments on “The \$20 Million Case for Morocco,” February 25, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/25/the-20-million-case-for-morocco>.

¹⁴³ Gordon Rayner, “Paris Attacks: Seven Hours and 5,000 Bullets - the Full Story of the Saint-Denis Shootout,” *The Telegraph*, November 18, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/12003186/Saint-Denis-siege-was-Paris-attacks-mastermind-Abdelhamid-Abaaoud-hiding-in-French-capital-all-along.html>.

provide military contingencies to fulfill immediate security gaps. The link between the threats in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, the Sahel, and even sub-Saharan region makes it imperative for UN to review its policy on collecting, analyzing and exploiting intelligence.

The persistence of decades-long conflicts such as that in the Western Sahara; where the peacekeeping mission MINURSO continues, suggests that the UN PKOs model is inadequate requiring a fundamental revision. A hypothesis suggests that the Western Sahara conflict continues as a result of the UN's deficient manning process filling, military and civilian, authorizations of the UN's peacekeeping operations (PKO) especially in the case of MINURSO. Others believe that the PKOs lack the capabilities, mainly the intelligence element, to perform their essential military engagements.

E. STRUCTURAL FLAWS IN THE PEACEKEEPING MISSION

UN inspectors have raised concerns about contingency-staff quality and personnel shortages in MINURSO. Their reports highlight the PKO's inefficiency, confining policy, and outdated operations.

1. Staffing

In the *Yearbook of the United Nations 2001*, the special committee on peacekeeping operations discusses MINURSO's staffing challenges, reporting an unchanged military manning requirement despite the expansion of the PKO mandate. The report additionally shows that MINURSO operates with a chronic shortage of personnel—the commission was alarmed to find, for example, that at one point in 2001, the police force responsible for ten sites in Western Sahara shrank from 47 to 26, which prevented it from performing basic functions in protecting UN assets and personnel.¹⁴⁴

The UN special committee also criticized the quality of the civilian staff assigned to the PKO mission. In its review of policies and procedures, including those pertaining to MINURSO, the report states that

¹⁴⁴ *Yearbook of the United Nations 2001*, Volume 55 (New York: United Nations, 2003), 221.

the roster for civilian peacekeepers was ineffective and inadequately supported, advertising of vacancies was limited, the grading system for newly recruited staff was inflexible, the interview process was inadequate, and missions seldom participated in the selection process for international staff.¹⁴⁵

Selection of the military contingents assigned to PKOs is also problematic. MINURSO started in 1992, when UN PKOs transitioned from first-generation missions model that is composed of national-balanced, small-military contingents to the new concept of second-generation missions, which combine civilians with a larger, more robust military force. The selection of these military units is based largely on strength, efficiency, and interoperability, rather than political affiliation.¹⁴⁶ These practical requirements, combined with a UN-mandated official language (usually French or English), favor Western or Western-trained forces.¹⁴⁷ The usual result is a peacekeeping element that lacks cultural and political understanding of the conflict—besides which, Western-oriented decision makers in a PKO contingency might find it hard to maintain objectivity. In North Africa and the Sahel, where the French and American have a large military footprint, MINURSO would require French- or American-trained senior decision makers for PKO high office. Since these government officials would presumably be pro-Moroccan, and moreover, since the French military has carried out many campaigns against the POLISARIO, French or French-trained officers would likely perceive the insurgents as antagonists—or at minimum, display a pro-Moroccan posture.

2. Disorganization and Lack of Oversight

In a report published by the Heritage Foundation, Brett D. Schaefer concludes that “the UN and its affiliated organizations are plagued by outdated and redundant missions and mandates, poor management, ineffectual oversight, and a general lack of accountability.” The report blames influential state members of the UN for this

¹⁴⁵ *Yearbook of the United Nations 2001* (New York: United Nations, 2003), 105.

¹⁴⁶ Egbert Jahn, *German Domestic and Foreign Policy: Political Issues under Debate* (Berlin: Springer, 2015), 234.

¹⁴⁷ Robert B. Oakley and Michael J. Dziedzic, *Policing the New World Disorder* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1996), 374.

inefficiency and slow response, citing, for example, the glacial response to the Western Sahara conflict, in which it was three years from ceasefire to MINURSO deployment.

Since its inception 70 years ago, UN operations have changed very little. In *What's Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It*, Thomas G. Weiss argues that whenever major state members express concern over UN decadence and propose a reform, the other states block it, because waste and lack of oversight are lucrative for the poor states.¹⁴⁸ Profiting from rubber-stamp approvals, MINURSO's mission has not been reevaluated in 40 years, despite a yearly budget of nearly \$60 million dollars.

3. Limited Capabilities

In 2014, the Clingendael Strategic Monitor project published an alarming report warning of an increase in the already unprecedented number of world peacekeeping organizations, with ten added in the past decade. This proliferation is not limited to UN PKOs—it includes EU, NATO, and the OSCE PKOs as well.¹⁴⁹

The demand for state building and peacekeeping has increased under the current fluid threat of terrorism. The ever-expanding mandates of UN PKO missions, combined with the nature of post-9/11 attacks, make it necessary to provide military contingencies to fill critical security gaps. As links between threats are discovered, whether in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, the Sahel, or the sub-Saharan region, it becomes imperative for the UN to review its policies on collecting, analyzing, and exploiting intelligence.

In his book, *Policing the New World Disorder*, Robert B Oakley writes:

Intelligence and public information/psychological operations assets as well as communications and logistics capabilities of the military contingent are vital for restoring the role of law and should be closely coordinated from the outset with corresponding CIVPOL functions.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Thomas G. Weiss, *What's Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 175.

¹⁴⁹ Jaïr Van Der Lijn et al., "Peacekeeping Operations in a Changing World," The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael, January 2015, <http://www.clingendael.nl/publication/peacekeeping-operations-changing-world>.

¹⁵⁰ Robert B. Oakley, and Michael J. Dziedzic, *Policing the New World Disorder* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1996), 519.

The UN frowns on intelligence collection as bordering on espionage and therefore incompatible with UN neutrality. UN organizations are supposed to operate respectfully within a host nation, though this position of trust may be exploited by bad actors, groups, and governments. But this delicacy comes at a price. In Western Sahara, a hotbed of crime, MINURSO operates ten sites. It is fair to assume that in the course of its 40-year deployment in Western Sahara and southern Algeria, UN observers, whether civilian or military, must occasionally have come across information that exposed illegal activities. But crime continues unremarked and unchecked, fueling unrest on a local and strategic level.

MINURSO's structure, per the UN SOP, maintains the position of a deputy chief operations officer (DCOO), whose sole function is to consolidate intelligence collected from all the sites and transmits it to the operations center in New York. The UN headquarters does not possess an intelligence center that analyzes and exploits this data to advance the PKO missions. Instead, the intelligence is carefully shared with a few concerned nations. The UN does not share collected intelligence with French and American forces operating in the region apart from the UN. These forces rely on their own intelligence capabilities, despite the UN–U.S.–French common goal of peacekeeping and stability in the region.

In 2014, during my assignment in support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic, I observed firsthand the impact of dysfunctional manning policies and lack of intelligence capabilities on the overall mission. The bureaucracy, confining policy, poor management, and outdated operations hampered my ability to positively contribute to the spirit of the UN PKO.

During my tenure, I witnessed the difficulties the UN had in finding, placing, and retaining civilian personnel. After arrival, some of these employees could not tolerate the uncivilized environment and bolted within a few days. On the military side, I observed a huge gap among units in terms of work ethic and experience, which was explicitly responsible for the complications in our daily missions.

In addition to MINUSCA's military presence, other entities operated in several portions of the C.A.R defending separate interests, notably AU and EU forces. In the chaos of the civil war in the Central African Republic, violence occurred on a daily basis. Different forces and opposing factions clashed on a daily basis as well. In this violent environment, I experienced the damage and the difficulty of operating without a means to exploit intelligence.

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IV. ALGERIA AND THE POLISARIO FRONT

Had I discovered the Algerian nation [nation] I would be a nationalist and I would not blush as though I had committed a crime . . . I will not die for the Algerian nation [patrie] because that nation does not exist. I have not found it. I have examined history, I questioned the living and the dead, I visited cemeteries: no one spoke to me about it¹⁵¹

—Ferhat Abbas, “La France C’est Moi,” *L’Entente*, 23 February 1936

Algeria’s relationship with Morocco remains contentious despite substantial common culture and history it shares with its neighbor. The Algerian government has stated publically its support for the POLISARIO Front. As Zune explains in *Western Sahara: War Nationalism And Conflict Irresolution*, “The war in Western Sahara also provided it (Algeria) with a golden opportunity to pursue its strategic interests indirectly. As one Algerian official boasted in early 1976, ‘We’re going to bleed Hassan white’(quoted in Parker 1987, 113).”¹⁵² Algeria meanwhile struggles to carve a national identity apart from Morocco’s dominance. Algeria’s internal conflicts as to the nature of its personality, combined with an internecine struggle for power and political aspirations, exacerbate its crisis.

Domestically, the political jostling within the Algerian regime plays a powerful role in foreign policy and interactions with regional and international players. As a major stakeholder, Algeria profoundly influences the regional dynamics that fuel the Western Sahara conflict, and any proposed resolution that envisions a resolution located solely within Western Saharan borders is myopic.

An approach that centers on problems like a cease-fire and referendum that are limited to the Western Sahara itself is unlikely to succeed. These problems, though important and immediate in their own right, need to be linked to broader regional issues-the ratification by Morocco of the 1972

¹⁵¹ John Foley, *Albert Camus* (Durham, GB: Routledge, 2014) ProQuest ebrary <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/nps/detail.action?docID=10455636&p00=foley>.

¹⁵² Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 34.

border agreement with Algeria, and the joint exploitation of mineral resources in northwest Africa.¹⁵³

While a great deal has been written about Moroccan and other regional motivations and actors in the Western Sahara conflict, some analysts insist that Algeria's domestic factors and the "geopolitics of faith" in North Africa have received too little attention. Algerian elements such as organized crime and state corruption benefit from instability, these writers claim, and Algeria exploits the conflict to serve domestic political interests, using the POLISARIO Front, for instance, as a puppet in the struggle among the DRS, army, and president. Some also link the persistence of the conflict with the increasing presence of the religious right organizations in the world's political space.

This chapter considers Algeria's internal power struggle and governmental involvement in organized crime as critical factors in the conflict and explores the impact of Christian right pressure on U.S. foreign policy, the development of international public policy, and human-rights campaigns.

A. BACKGROUND

To understand Algerian foreign policy, it is important to recognize the complexity of the regime. While no one has a holistic picture of who is really in charge in Algiers, it is clear that Algeria's constitutional organizations are powerless. Since independence, the Algerian government has endured a silent struggle among three powerful forces: the National Liberation Front (FLN), the department of intelligence and security (DRS), and the military.

After the 1999 election, the Algerian presidency joined this trio to become the fourth major actor in domestic politics. Algerian decision makers belong to a select group of military elites, called *le pouvoir* (the power), that "holds the power behind the formal arrangements of government."¹⁵⁴ The rules of engagement are simple: maximize control and weaken the adversary, by all means necessary.

¹⁵³ John Damis, "The Western Sahara Conflict: Myths and Realities," *Middle East Journal* 37 no. 2, (1983) : 169–79, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4326560>.

¹⁵⁴ Keenan, *Dark Sahara*, 100.

The FLN and the military have been allied since before Algeria's independence; from the French colonial era to the present, the FLN has served as the military's political wing. The FLN was born in Arab nationalist ideas, emphasizing Arabic language and culture and marginalizing the Algerian Amazigh identity. Since 1962, the army and FLN have excluded any Amazigh from high office in the party and military. The DRS, by contrast, was molded in a period when pan-Arabic ideology was secondary (post-1965 and the Sand War), and Amazighs have traditionally controlled its influential posts. The Berber identity has dominated the DRS since inception, and the DRS has thrived by exploiting the Arab–Berber divide, sponsoring and retaining support from Berbers in key positions.

B. ALGERIA'S DOMESTIC POLITICS

Algeria's complex and irregular politics have had a tremendous impact on the domestic political, social, and economic conditions in Algeria. They have also adversely affected geopolitics and security in the North Africa–Sahel region.

1. The Internal Struggle for Power

In his book *Dark Sahara: America's War on Terror in Africa*, Jeremy Keenan describes the major roles that the DRS and military have played in shaping the country.¹⁵⁵ The rise of radical Islam invigorated the DRS, which has expanded significantly apart from the military. The army's power was evident in the 1992 coup, when it cancelled national elections and pursued and massacred Islamic Party winners. To retain power, the military killed thousands of civilians. Dubbed the “dirty war,” this violence aroused international sanctions and condemnation.¹⁵⁶

In 1992, the army relinquished power and in 1999 nominated a leader in the FLN, Boutaflika, for president. The DRS, which preferred to deal with a civilian, did not object. During the 2004 elections, Boutaflika, who was losing party support, struck a deal with his rival in the National Rally for Democracy Party (RND), securing the backing of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 162.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Ahmed Ouyahia, the general secretary of the RND and an Amazigh from Tizi Ouzou, in exchange for the post of prime minister.¹⁵⁷

In his second term of office, Boutaflika conspired with Ouyahia, “a longtime protégé of the DRS,”¹⁵⁸ to contain the Algerian military. His first significant order of business was to depose the army chief of staff, General Mohammed Lamari¹⁵⁹ and then to capitalize, with the DRS, on the army’s lack of fortitude by grooming a successor strong enough to prevent their seizure of power.¹⁶⁰ The plan worked. President Boutaflika and the DRS chief, General Mouhamed Amin Mediène, shared control of the government.

At the end of his second term, Boutaflika persuaded Mediène to support an amendment to the constitution that would eliminate presidential term limits. Their seemingly unbreakable alliance ended, however, shortly after Boutaflika began a third term in 2009. Mediène expected the president to groom a suitable successor; instead, Boutaflika started preparing his own younger brother, Said. This blatant nepotism and the prospect of an entrenched dynasty moved the outraged DRS to react. Beginning in 2010, Mediène conducted several operations to weaken the president, notably ousting pro-Boutaflika leaders from Sonatrach, the state-owned energy giant, and replacing them with Berber DRS-supported executives.¹⁶¹

2. Organized Crime and Corruption in Government

The origins of Algerian support for SADR may have been rooted in congenial political ideology, fear of Moroccan aggression, and control of natural resources, but the present Algerian investment in sheer unrest is enormous. The instability in the Western Sahara border and the Sahel is extremely lucrative for the corrupt, wealthy, and powerful of the Algerian regime. It would be nigh impossible for the corrupt military government

¹⁵⁷ William Zartman, *Arab Spring: Negotiating in the Shadow of the Intifadat* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 152, <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 150.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 150–152.

to pursue seriously any resolution that came at the expense of the entrenched black-market economy.

Keenan's findings in his research on Mali and Algeria "revealed a complex network of family relationships linking many of the senior levels of the regional administration in both southern Algeria and Niger with both smuggling and local banditry networks."¹⁶² He concludes that these criminal networks are sanctioned by senior policymakers in Algiers.¹⁶³

Keenan links the rise of corruption to the deterioration of the Algerian economy in the early 90s, claiming the racket began in 1993, when the IMF rescued Algeria from the brink of bankruptcy. The IMF granted "a debt-rescheduling package generating a windfall of some \$10 billion per annum."¹⁶⁴ But the intention of the structural-adjustment program (SAP)—to foster a liberal market economy in Algeria—backfired. "The privatization policy created a 'plunder economy,'"¹⁶⁵ intensifying corruption and violence.

Keenan emphasizes the rampant involvement of Algerian military and security forces and the DRS in black-market trade,¹⁶⁶ observing that their operations touched

on almost every aspect of commerce in Algeria, ranging from such things as arms and drug trafficking at the more extreme end of the spectrum, through cigarette and people trafficking, car theft and exportation, to the control of food and livestock markets, cement and construction materials, container trafficking, and so on.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Frederic Wehrey and Anouar Boukhars, eds., *Perilous Desert* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013), 75, ProQuest ebrary.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Keenan, *Dark Sahara*, 150.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 151–151.

¹⁶⁶ Wehrey and Boukhars, eds., *Perilous Desert*, 135.

¹⁶⁷ Keenan, *Dark Sahara*, 100.

Keenan ties the 1992 assassination of Algeria president Mohamed Boudiaf to the government mafia, suggesting that Boudiaf's anticorruption reforms threatened members of the military who resolved to liquidate him.¹⁶⁸

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy estimates that a fourth of the fuel produced in Algeria is sold on the black market.¹⁶⁹ The bulk is distributed in Mali and Mauritania; some is smuggled into Morocco, despite the closed border. The institute study highlights the dependence of Algeria's domestic economy on illicit activity, in addition to the elite's enormous stake in revenues from contraband.

The economies of regions along unsecured North African borders, particularly Ahnet, on the Algerian–Libyan border, and Tanezrouft, on the Algerian–Malian border,¹⁷⁰ depend on smuggling, and porous borders have enabled global crime organizations to operate with impunity in an interconnected Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. The U.S. Department of Defense confirms a spike of illicit activity in these areas, involving terrorists such as the notorious Mokhtar Belmokhtar,¹⁷¹ and the European tobacco company Altadis has revealed a proliferation of smuggling routes through the oases of Tifariti and Bir Lahlou, which are controlled by the POLISARIO Front.¹⁷² These clandestine activities occur with the consent or complicity of legal authorities, in Mauritania, Mali, and Algeria alike.

3. Algeria's Creation of Terror

After 9/11, Algeria and the U.S. formed an unlikely alliance forged from oil, war, terror, and strategic interests. Algeria needed weapons, international clout, freedom from sanctions, and a brand new image; the Algerian DRS needed instability to justify its existence. Meanwhile, the Bush administration needed terrorism to secure oil from

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 154.

¹⁶⁹ Vish Sakthivel, *Kerry's Visit to Morocco and Algeria: Navigating between Competitors*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2013, <http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1735649377?accountid=12702>.

¹⁷⁰ Keenan, *Dark Sahara*, 18.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 185.

¹⁷² Wehrey, and Boukhars, eds., *Perilous Desert*, 169–170.

Africa. The attacks of 9/11, coupled with terrorist attacks in Europe and Africa, created the conditions for an uneasy marriage.

After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. shifted its focus to Africa to pursue the war on terrorism and other strategic interests.¹⁷³ The U.S. had faced an energy crisis in the late 90s importing over fifty percent of its domestic consumption and needed a strategy to ensure its supplies. Within his first thirty days in office, President Bush set up the National Energy Policy Development (NEPD) group, chaired by vice-president Dick Cheney. In May 2001, the NEPD published its report, which “defined African oil as a ‘strategic national interest’ and thus a resource that the U.S. might exert military force to control.”¹⁷⁴ The subsequent horrific attacks on American soil created the foundation for a narrative that expanded the U.S. war on terrorism into North Africa and the Sahel.

Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks in 2001, a synagogue bombing in Tunisia in 2002, a suicide attack at a Casablanca hotel in 2003, the abduction of 32 tourists in Algeria in 2003, and the Spanish train bombing of 2004. AFRICOM and world security organizations linked these events to Al-Qaeda operatives in North Africa and the Sahel, providing the rationale for military intervention.¹⁷⁵

During this time, the world considered Algeria a pariah state for its brutal oppression during the dirty war. International sanctions crippled the Algerian economy and prevented its acquisition of modern, sophisticated weapon systems,¹⁷⁶ but after the attacks on U.S. soil, Algeria leveraged gruesome images of the falling towers to justify a crackdown on Islamists,¹⁷⁷ comparing its actions to the American war on al-Qaeda. The Algerian military’s propaganda machine inflated the terrorist threat, hoping to end the arms embargo. With a substantial budget and long shopping list, the Algerian president made several trips to Washington to argue his need for advanced weapons against the terrorist threat in the Sahel. While the state department endorsed the requests on both

¹⁷³ Keenan, *Dying Sahara*, 10.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Keenan, *Dark Sahara*, 164.

occasions, Algeria left empty-handed; the White House was not convinced.¹⁷⁸ This failure added to Algeria's domestic and regional pressures.

Algeria found a solution in the Sahel, as KGB-trained operatives of the DRS concocted a strategy to create unrest in the Sahel and secure international attention, figuring that the right level of instability would allow Algeria to position itself as a regional hegemon and antiterrorist ally without inviting the intervention of any Western military.¹⁷⁹ Keenan asserts that by fomenting terrorism in the Sahel, Algeria could serve up a new front in war on terror for the U.S. The DRS's short-term goal of sponsoring AQIM and other terrorist organizations was to deflect attention from the dirty war; the long-term strategy was to promote itself as the only regional power capable of engaging and containing the new terrorist threats, thereby securing a favorable relationship with the West while undermining Morocco and Libya.

4. Domestic Terrorism

In an article in *States of War Since 9/11: Terrorism, Sovereignty and the War on Terror*,¹ Jeremy Keenan discusses the connection between Algeria's DRS intelligence agency and domestic terrorism. According to Keenan, the DRS created domestic terrorist factions to defeat an Islamist movement that was attempting to overthrow the government in the early 1990s. He presents new intelligence that points to DRS originations for the terrorist group Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA), which was to infiltrate other radical Islamic networks and defeat them from within.¹⁸⁰ Keenan quotes John Schindler, a former high-ranking intelligence officer, member of the National Security Council (NSC), and a professor of national-security affairs at the U.S. Naval War College, as stating,

The GIA (Armed Islamic Group) [of the 1990s and the predecessor of the GSPC] was the creation of the DRS; using proven Soviet methods of penetration and provocation, the agency assembled it to discredit the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 165.

¹⁷⁹ Keenan, *Dying Sahara*, 171–172.

¹⁸⁰ Jeremy Keenan, "Reincarnating Al Qaeda: The Global War on Terror and the 'Arab Spring,'" in *States of War since 9/11: Terrorism, Sovereignty and the War on Terror*, Alex Houen, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 159.

extremists. Much of [the] GIA's leadership consisted of DRS agents, who drove the group into the dead end of mass murder, a ruthless tactic that thoroughly discredited GIA Islamists among nearly all Algerians. Most of its major operations were the handiwork of the DRS, included in 1995 wave of bombings in France. Some of the most notorious massacres of civilians were perpetrated by military special units masquerading as mujahidin, or by GIA squads under DRS control.¹⁸¹

5. DRS Manipulation of the POLISARIO

From the start, Algeria and Morocco capitalized on their domestic and regional problems to strengthen their narratives and advance their agendas. Once the global war on terrorism kicked off, it was no surprise that both regimes exploited the hunt for al-Qaeda to their benefit. Algeria saw an opportunity to exit its international isolation, while Morocco aimed to bolster its international support in Western Sahara, and both spoke against each other's actions. Nevertheless, Morocco's accusations linking Algeria and the POLISARIO to terrorist groups were founded in evidence that showed the participation of some members of the Tindouf POLISARIO as having participated in AQIM and MUJAO (Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa) operations, in addition to involvement in the drugs and weapons trade in the Sahel. The question arises whether the Algerian regime was sponsoring the instability or, rather, losing its grip on the security situation.

International security services have long suspected Algerian military and DRS involvement in hostage taking and drug trafficking. However, Rabat's claims connecting the DRS to AQIM received no traction until certain events that unfolded in the Sahel and North Africa. One event happened in December 2010, when

six members of the POLISARIO were arrested in Mali in connection with cocaine trafficking. The key drug trafficker arrested was a certain Sultan Ould Badi. Ould Badi was not a bit-part player: he was reportedly the head of POLISARIO's "special missions" and believed to have also been involved in AQIM kidnappings. On capture, he was threatening the

¹⁸¹ John R. Schindler "The Ugly Truth about Algeria," *The National Interest*, July 10, 2012. <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-ugly-truth-about-algeria-7146?page=2>.

authorities in Bamako that he would reveal the AQIM–DRS connection.¹⁸²

On learning of Ould Badi's arrest, President Boutaflika, on official visit in Germany, went into damage control, immediately deploying General Rachid Laalali, head of the DRS, on a chartered plane to Bamako, where he secured Sultan Ould Badi's release on 9 December 2010.¹⁸³ Since then, news sources, books, and intelligence reports have repeatedly demonstrated connections among POLISARIO camps in Algeria, international organized crime, trafficking, and terrorism.

The crimes and violence of the Sahel used to take a back seat to international security concerns. Recently, however, decision makers in the EU and the U.S. have placed the instability of North Africa and Sahel at the center in their foreign-security policy. The Center for Naval Analysis Strategic Studies (CNA) warned in December 2012, for example, that "there is evidence that AQIM has infiltrated the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf, as well as indications that Sahrawi from these camps have joined terrorist groups based in Mali."¹⁸⁴ A regional threat assessment published by the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies (IUCTS) in February 2013 concludes that AQIM "provided training, financial assistance, and weapons to its affiliates and had attracted an influx of recruits from the region including militants from the POLISARIO camps in Algeria, displaced refugees, and radicals from Western countries."¹⁸⁵

International lawmakers have also publically confirmed the collusion of the POLISARIO Front with AQIM and MUJAO. For instance, "In February 2013, the Malian foreign minister confirmed the presence of Sahrawi combatants from the Tindouf camps among the groups that fled the French -led intervention, which was launched to counter an advance of insurgents from northern Mali toward the capital."¹⁸⁶ The

¹⁸² Keenan, *Dying Sahara*, 221.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁸⁴ Sarah Vogler, "Security Challenges in Libya and the Sahel: Workshop Report," accessed March 26, 2016, https://cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DCP-2012-U-003450-Final.pdf.

¹⁸⁵ Yonah Alexander, "Terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel in 2012: Global Reach and Implications," *Potomac Institute for Policy Studies/International Law Institute*, February 2013, <http://www.terrorisemelectronicjournal.org/knowledge-base/selected-special-reports/>.

¹⁸⁶ Wehrey, and Boukhars, eds., *Perilous Desert*, 170.

GlobalPost and *Agence France Press* (AFP) confirmed this report, revealing that French and African forces decimated Mali's Al Qaeda-linked Islamist insurgency, forcing dozens to reorganize in the POLISARIO Front camps in Algeria.¹⁸⁷

In sum, organized crime in the Sahel and North Africa operates with the permission or cooperation of the DRS and is connected to terrorist groups in the Sahel that are supported by the POLISARIO Front. One may freely deduce that the DRS, organized crime, POLISARIO Front, and terrorist groups partner in a way or another, and it is reasonable to expect the DRS to enlist any or all of its partners to advance its quest for power—in fact, it is widely reported that the AQIM kidnapping of three Western aid workers from POLISARIO-run camps in October 2011 was DRS work for this purpose. Keenan's analysis in *The Dying Sahara* and *The Dark Sahara* concludes that these abductions stemmed from Algeria's internal competition for power—he believes the DRS orchestrated these high-profile crimes to discredit and undermine Boutaflika during the presidential elections.¹⁸⁸

6. The Religious Right and the Christian Lobby

Like Morocco, Algeria retains lobbyists in Washington. According to public information relating to the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), from 2007–2013, Algeria spent \$2.4 million lobbying for the POLISARIO Front, compared with Morocco's \$20 million on behalf of its territorial integrity.¹⁸⁹ Though it spends perhaps a tenth as much, Algeria benefits from the ancillary lobbying of some Christian interest groups who seek to shape domestic and international public policy in accordance with Christian missions and values. In Algeria, these interest groups promote freedom of religion in the Kabyle region and the liberation of the Saharawi in the Tindouf camps. Through their support of these minority communities, these groups help to create a favorable environment for evangelical missions.

¹⁸⁷ "Defeated in Mali, Islamists Begin to Reorganise," *GlobalPost*, 2013, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/130416/defeated-mali-islamists-begin-reorganise>.

¹⁸⁸ Keenan, *Dark Sahara*, 2.

¹⁸⁹ Eliza Barkley, and Kristen Chick, Comments on "The \$20 Million Case for Morocco," *Foreign Policy*, February 25, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/25/the-20-million-case-for-morocco/>.

According to the *Emory Law Journal*, “religious interest groups collectively spend over \$350 million every year attempting to entrench religious values into the law. These groups have become the primary mechanism for religious involvement in federal politics.”¹⁹⁰ The journal also explains that

These groups are interest groups that are empowered to represent particular religious traditions, specific congregations, or both. Powerful examples of this form of interest group include Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ Office of Public and International Affairs, “whose influence and actions are relevant to the mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, which is comprised of “15 national, state and regional Baptist bodies in the United States and supported by thousands of churches and individuals across the country,” and the Mennonite Central Committee, established by Mennonite denominational bodies to represent their interests in Washington.¹⁹¹

In *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy: Political Strategies for the Health of the Nation*, Ronald J. Sider discuss evangelical activism, writing that groups such as the National Associations of Evangelicals (NAE) believe that current circumstances, in which affluent evangelical Christians are responding directly to post-9/11 world terrorism, provide a historic opportunity to shape domestic and international policy.¹⁹² The author adds that religious institutions are generally exempt from many of the disclosure regulations imposed on other organizations, allowing them to finance their political ventures away from public scrutiny.¹⁹³ These exemptions, based on the first-amendment rights of churches and religious groups, make it nearly impossible to determine the identity of targeted lawmakers and total monies contributed to specific causes. However, the Pew Research Center reports that nearly two-thirds of religious

¹⁹⁰ Zoe Robinson, “Lobbying in the Shadows: Religious Interest Groups in the Legislative Process,” *Emory Law Journal*, 64, no. 4 (December 17, 2015), <http://law.emory.edu/elj/content/volume-64/issue-4/articles/lobbying-shadows-religious-groups-legislative.html>.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ronald J. Sider, and Diane Knippers. *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy: Political Strategies for the Health of the Nation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 363.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 369.

organizations operating in Washington seek to influence both international as well as domestic policies.¹⁹⁴

Algeria privileges access to Tindouf to those organizations that share the POLISARIO's separatist ideology, though certain UN activities are not allowed in the refugee camps. For 40 years, Algeria and the SADR have barred the UN High Commission on Refugees (HCR) from conducting a census of the Sahrawi population in Tindouf, wary of the larger repercussions; by contrast, they have invited religion-based NGOs to provide humanitarian, cultural, and educational services in Tindouf (while prohibiting such missionary activity in the Kabyle region).¹⁹⁵ It is reasonable to assume that Algeria exploits humanitarian and religious activism both to derive practical aid and to encourage favorable Christian influence in Washington.

Since September 11, the concept of "good religion/bad religion" has gained traction in international public-policy circles,¹⁹⁶ by which it is agreed that beneficial "religion should be restored to international affairs, while bad religion should be reformed or eradicated."¹⁹⁷ This approach considers religion in formulating foreign policy, developing public policy, and orienting human-rights campaigns.¹⁹⁸

In her book, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion*, Elizabeth Hurd demonstrates that the POLISARIO has aligned itself and benefits from the support of global religious interest groups to make a comeback in international affairs.¹⁹⁹ Both Sahrawi and non-Sahrawi actors have used faith and religion to persuade international audiences to provide humanitarian and political support for the Sahrawi

¹⁹⁴ "Lobbying for the Faithful," Pew Research Center, November 21, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/11/21/lobbying-for-the-faithful-exec/>.

¹⁹⁵ "Religious Conflicts in Algeria (Christianity)," *Algerian Review*, 2010, <https://algerianreview.wordpress.com/2010/01/17/religious-conflicts-in-algeria-christianity/>.

¹⁹⁶ Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "The Religion Agenda: The Sahrawi Refugees and the Politics of Tolerance," *EInternational Relations*, December 26, 2015, <http://www.e-ir.info/2015/12/26/the-religion-agenda-the-sahrawi-refugees-and-the-politics-of-tolerance/>.

¹⁹⁷ Hurd, "Religion Agenda."

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "The Pragmatics of Performance: Putting 'Faith' in Aid in the Sahrawi Refugee Camps," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 3 (2011): 533–47.

cause. With Algeria's support, the POLISARIO has succeeded in mobilizing evangelical activists as effective lobbyists for political their separatist cause, both in Europe and the U.S.²⁰⁰

Hurd cites the congressional testimony of Congressman Teresa K. E. Smith de Cherif, who defended the POLISARIO against Morocco's allegation that it was involved with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and notes that Smith de Cherif promoted a tolerant image of the Sahrawi people in Tindouf, while implying an Islamist, anti-Christian attitude in Morocco—framing the struggle as between oppressed, poor African refugees who are open to Christian teaching versus a harsh Islamic country that persecutes Christians. Hurd believes this clash of ideas serves the global vision of religious activists. She Hurd wrote that

Remarkably, so tolerant is (POLISARIO) Saharawi Islam that within the last few years, Christian evangelists have held roundtable discussions with Saharawi and Algerian religious clerics in the Tindouf camps and have built a school for English language studies in the Smara camp. Meanwhile, Morocco expels a Spanish citizen from El-Ayoun, where she was teaching Spanish, without grounds, but because she is an evangelist Christian.²⁰¹

The *Journal of Refugee Studies* confirms that high-profile interest groups such as Faith and Action in Washington have lobbied in favor of the POLISARIO to promote freedom and religious liberty. These groups represent evangelical activists such as Dan Stanley of Rock Fish Church and Cheryl Banda and Janet Lenz of Christ the Rock Church in Wisconsin, who lobbied the UN general assembly and the decolonization committee to increase their efforts to liberate Western Sahara. These groups funded the construction of a language school in Tindouf and delivery of humanitarian aid. They also organize regular missions trips for church volunteers and congressional visits.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 32–34.

²⁰¹ Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, “Pragmatics of Performance,” 533–47.

²⁰² Ibid.

The religious-interest lobby has seen success in shaping some important U.S. policies in Morocco. In *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution*, Stephen Zunes claims that the

POLISARIO's supporters in the U.S. Congress made sure later that Western Sahara was specifically exempt from provisions of a free-trade agreement with Morocco. As U.S. trade representative (and future World Bank president) Robert Zoellick was forced to emphasize, "The United States and many other countries do not recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara" (quoted in Mundy 2005). By then, 2004, Total had dropped out of Western Sahara ostensibly for business reasons. Isolated, Kerr-McGee came under increasing pressure, even in its home state of Oklahoma; Christian activists who had built up humanitarian relations with the Sahrawi refugees helped put pressure on the company and on the state's political leaders. Kerr-McGee finally withdrew in 2006.²⁰³

C. THE POWER OF WEAK NEIGHBORS

It must be observed that the fragile, crisis-ridden countries of the Sahel also contribute to the intolerable pressure on the people of Tindouf, who are liable to succumb to radicalization and illicit activities. As instability in the Sahel aggravates desperate living conditions, individuals may resort to desperate measures.

All the countries of the Sahel—Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, both Sudans, Chad, and Eritrea—are weak and corrupt, despite the potential offered by their rich natural resources, and only a small elite has power and wealth. These natural resources draw international interest and fuel racial, linguistic, cultural, and religious divides as groups compete for opportunity. On the political front, minority factions are emboldened to clash with weak governments and push for separate identity and governance.

The Amazighs of the Kayle in Algeria, for example, want to create a separate state in which to reap the benefits of their natural resources, which are presently controlled and exploited by Algeria. The Touareg of Mali clash regularly with security forces over water and arable land, and the Touareg of Libya, many of whom served in

²⁰³ Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 267.

Qaddafi's private militia, are sitting on a trove of sophisticated weaponry and training brought home from Libya.²⁰⁴

In addition to the general distress, the civil wars raging in failed states along the southern border of the Sahel, notably the Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo, have brought spikes in crime, violence and chaos.

The continuing crisis allows ideologies, weapons, drugs, counterfeit goods, and combatants to fan out across borders, creating an environment in which terrorist activities may be conducted with impunity. International terrorist organizations, which depend on organized crime to fund their operations, use the mayhem to connect with regional groups, such as AQIM, Boko Haram (in Nigeria), and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, to raise revenue, recruit fighters and expand their footprint.²⁰⁵

D. CONCLUSION

Research has shown that in addition to the widely accepted opinion that the conflict in Western Sahara is a product of Algerian–Moroccan rivalry, other factors are also in play, such as domestic Algerian politics, U.S. geopolitical interests, and lobbying by religious organizations.

Factions within the Algerian government compete for power and use various strategies to expand their influence, including alliances within the *pouvoir* and the leveraging of economic, political, and, often, racial ties. In addition, the DRS is alleged to have created and fanned unrest to further Algerian interests.

Analyzing the impact of corruption on domestic politics and the economy, this study concludes that the crime and misbehavior of government officials has been exacerbated by the economic crisis and institutional malfeasance, which created a black-market-dependent economy benefiting the elite, and that personal financial incentives have encouraged the regime to support a “manageable” level of instability. Further, this research notes allegations that the DRS has cooperated with criminal groups and

²⁰⁴ Wehrey and Boukhars, eds., *Perilous Desert*, 61–68.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

manufactured terrorism in order to oppose it, thus demonstrating its legitimacy and good will to the West.

Algeria's interest in the Western Sahara conflict has evolved since its inception. In today's world, instability in the Western Sahara is good for business—unrest keeps the borders porous. The consequence of this tolerance is a proliferation of major criminal activities that generate billions of dollars for decision makers who will not hesitate to use the POLISARIO Front to undermine their rivals and advance their economic interests. The chapter concludes by considering the influence of Christian lobbying and weak neighboring states as having a substantial impact in the POLISARIO Front conflict.

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V. CONCLUSION

A. FINDINGS

The Western Sahara conflict is one of the most protracted contests the modern world has seen. Regional and foreign actors aligned in armed conflict involving Morocco and the POLISARIO Front in 1975, and clashes continued till the UN-brokered peace deal in 1991, followed by MINURSO deployment in 1992. The ceasefire did not end the conflict, however—and for nearly forty years, the UN has been unable to wrap it up.

This research examines four commonly posited reasons for this failure: Algerian aggression; foreign interference; UN inaction; and a combination of factors. It is found that while myriad forces are in play, UN inaction is the most fatal—because the UN is the one entity entrusted and equipped to act impartially and competently to build peace. The UN's lack of performance is principally due to five difficulties:

1. An archaic structure unequal to the task of resolving modern conflicts and terrorism
2. Systemic disorganization and lack of oversight
3. An inability to attract and retain qualified civilian staff in a hazardous environment
4. A built-in bias toward Western allies due to the selection criteria for military contingents (including language requirements)
5. Limited operational capability, especially vis-à-vis intelligence and policing

UN incompetency in staffing and intelligence alone are sufficient to sabotage the resolution of the Western Sahara conflict and have made anything but chronic failure impossible. Nevertheless, the UN is but first among a host of factors implicated in the Western Sahara conflict, which in combination have made its conclusion extremely challenging. These include:

1. The advent of separatist movements in Western Sahara in reaction to Spanish and Moroccan domination.
2. The social, political, and economic disorientation generated by the evolving phases of the conflict.

3. Moroccan obstructionism, particularly in
 - Invoking the ICJ to prevent Spain from conducting a referendum on self-determination
 - Orchestrating the Green March
 - Rejecting the validity of the 1974 census
 - Lobbying of UN members with power of veto.
4. The pursuit by France and America of special interests and separate regional alliances.
5. Algerian political and social maladies, including
 - Intense suspicion of Morocco
 - Internal power struggles and corruption at all levels
 - Support through the POLISARIO to AQIM and international criminal and terrorist groups
 - The fostering of external and internal Islamist groups
 - Encouragement of government failure and grievance in the Sahel
 - Exploitation of political naive religious groups with congressional contacts.

To this analysis presented in this research, the author adds his personal assessment, based on close professional observation: namely, that as currently conducted, the Western Sahara conflict is both self-perpetuating and irresolvable. While a clean slate is never possible, a clean house may be: systemic reforms in the UN are more likely to become a priority as the world apprehends the increasing scope and gravity of the conflict.

B. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The UN deficiencies identified in this research go beyond its non-performance in Western Sahara. MINURSO's inability to resolve the stalemate is a symptom of radical problems within the parent organization. Policymakers are advised to bear in mind several key points.

First, the operational and structural deficiencies of the UN are entrenched and systemic. Policymakers should take a hard look at what the future role of the UN might

be in the face of unconventional, ever-evolving threats, given that conventional threats have historically strained UN capabilities. An unreformed UN is not equipped to serve the common wellbeing of our interconnected world.

Second, the UN veto power, a privilege is wielded by only five members, should be reevaluated. A mechanism for strengthening the voice of emerging powers and weaker states might be considered. Evidence suggests that while exercising its veto power may serve a nation's short-term interests, in the long run this preemption may cause substantial loss for all members by undermining the UN's egalitarian *mythos*, morale, and effectiveness.

Third, the status quo in Western Sahara cannot be viewed as sustainable. The POLISARIO Front, Algeria, Morocco, and the Sahel have all invested more than they can reasonably spare in pursuit of their perceived self-interests.

- For the POLISARIO Front, poverty and despair among the refugees has created radicalization and international crime that exploits the porous borders and weakness of the Sahel governments.
- In Algeria, another wave of unrest after the Arab Spring would be crippling. Algeria's government continues to deteriorate, along with its ailing president, Boutaflika. The corruption, radicalization, and poverty that have accompanied the Western Sahara conflict have created havoc in Algeria. The economy is floundering with the fall of oil prices—Algeria's currency reserves, once among the largest in the world, are now almost depleted.
- Morocco appears to be a rare example of real reform and stability in the region and Arab world. Morocco a major economic partner with the EU and facilitates the market in Africa; it is one of a handful of U.S. non-NATO allies and a serious, proven partner against terrorism. But its brand of democracy is still in its infancy. Unrest in Tindouf could very well destabilize the Moroccan regime, with grim repercussions for European security.
- The Sahel hangs by a thread. Destabilization of any of these players would be catastrophic. The fallout from another fallen state like Libya would put more weapons on the black market, more refugees in camps, and inevitably, more frequent and grandiose terror attacks in Europe and the world.

On a human level, immiseration of this magnitude and duration must reach a point of despair. With nothing to lose, individuals and people groups can be expected to resort to livelihoods, lifestyles, or armed conflict that pose grave risk to regional and international security—as well as to their personal long-term prospects for survival. After forty years, the UN and global leaders must understand and grapple with the Western Sahara conflict or reap bitter consequences worldwide.

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